JOHN O' LONDON'S LITTLE BOOKS.

IS IT GOOD ENGLISH

AND LIKE MATTERS

BY
JOHN O' LONDON

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IS IT GOOD ENGLISH?

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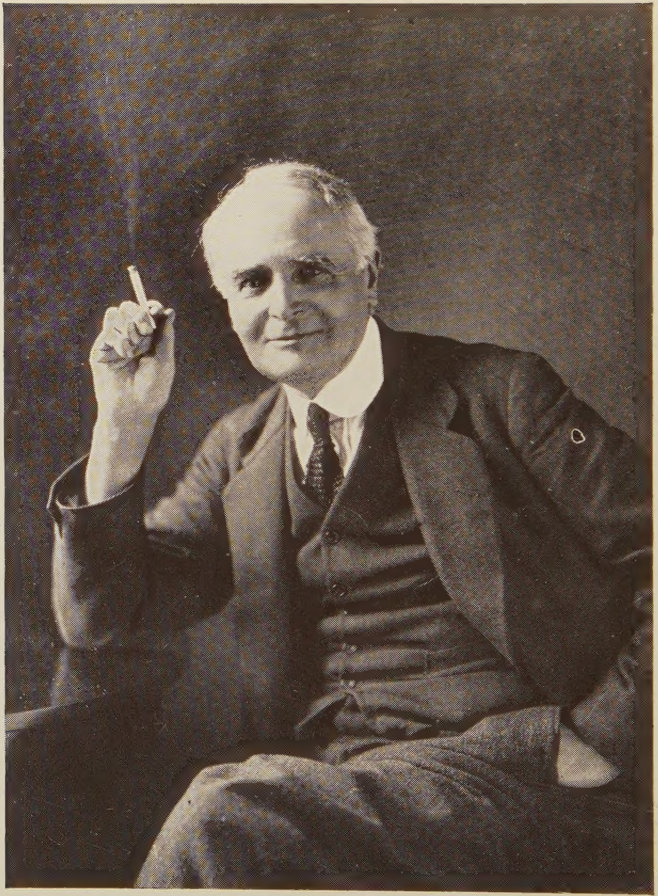

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J. O'L.

IS IT GOOD ENGLISH

AND LIKE MATTERS

BY

JOHN O' LONDON

LONDON
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TO

MEN, WOMEN,

AND

GRAMMARIANS.

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WHY AND WHAT

THIS book represents my part in many pleasant dialogues with readers of JOHN O' LONDON'S WEEKLY with whom, in the last five years, I have discussed questions concerning good English.

My point of view is that, in everyday life, good English follows clear thinking rather than that system of rules called Grammar which youth loathes and maturity forgets. With notes on forms and phrases I have mingled others of broader but like kind.

I wish to thank my friend Mr. Ariel Wright for help in revision, and for valuable (if sometimes vexatious) suggestions.

JOHN O' LONDON.

June, 1924.

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IS IT GOOD ENGLISH?

Were the makers of the Authorised Version of the Bible justified in attaching a singular verb to two nouns or to several nouns as in the text: "And now *abideth* faith, hope, charity, these three," or, again, in "Where moth and rust *doth* corrupt"? The same question has been asked about Mr. Kipling's "Recessional" line, "The tumult and the shouting *dies*."

The grammar books often shirk such questions. One well-known text-book, after laying down the rule that "A verb agrees with its subject in number and person," proceeds to give, under the head of "Observations," a number of instances in which this rule has been violated by distinguished writers. But it does not set up definite grammatical exceptions to the rule. It

says that " sometimes the verb is made to agree with the subject next it alone, being mentally supplied with the rest, especially when one subject stands out in some way by itself." Thus Milton has

" Both death and I *am* found eternal,"

and Byron wrote :—

" To rive what God and Turk and Time *hath* spared."

Again, it is admitted that the verb is often written in the singular " when two nouns connected by *and* are so nearly synonymous as to suggest but one idea." One grammar gives two examples under this head :—

" Wherein *doth* sit the dread and fear of kings." (" Merchant of Venice," IV., 1.)

" Hostility and civil tumult *reigns*." (" King John," IV., 2.)

All this does not help the student very much. It may induce him to pass by as good English similar expressions when he meets them in great writers (who make their slips), but it will hardly give him confidence to adopt such forms himself, or to judge of their admissibility wherever he meets them. He is told what " sometimes " is done ; he is not told clearly what may or must be done.

One secures a better starting-point with an uncompromising defender of the rules of grammar. Such a champion was Mr. G. Washington Moon. In his little book, "The Revisers' English," published in 1882, he attacked "the violations of the laws of the language" committed by the makers of the Revised Version of the Bible, and one of his stoutest protests was against the violation I am discussing. But this is found as frequently in the Authorised Version of 1604–10—a fact which in no way abates Mr. Moon's grammarian severity. He takes his stand on the rule, aware that his protests, if obeyed, would involve the alteration of some of our most simple and settled speech.

For example, he declares that "no English scholar who has any respect for his reputation as such would contend that it is grammatically correct to say, 'Thine *is* the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,' for that is saying, 'They is thine'!" He would have the verb altered. Similarly he condemns the following expressions in the Authorised Version :—

"Among which *was* Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children."

"To comprehend what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."

"Out of the same mouth *proceedeth* blessing and cursing."

It is needless to multiply examples; far more important is it to inquire where the truth really lies.

Mr. Moon's rejection of great writers as authorities for breaches of rule is intelligible, but I think it is in part mistaken. He says:—

"Dr. Sanday quotes similar errors from Shakespeare, and seems to hold the opinion that because a certain form of speech has occasionally been used by a great writer it must be correct. But with respect to examples of departure from rule, I quite agree with the Rev. Matthew Harrison that 'it signifies nothing that this or that expression has been used by Johnson, or Addison, or Swift, or Pope, or any other writer whatever. . . . It is not a question of genius, but simply a question of syntax.'"

But is it? Mr. Moon speaks of these departures from rule by great writers as "errors." Even he would have allowed that they were not ignorances, and that they could not, in the majority of cases, have been slips. The singular verb with a plural nominative is found in the Authorised Version, in the Revised Version, in Shakespeare, in Milton, and in many of our

greatest writers down to Kipling's "Recessional." An example from Wordsworth :—

> "Now *was* there bustle in the Vicar's house
> And earnest expectation."

Had all these writers a grammatical blind-spot on the brain ? Were they all afflicted by error or lunacy or carelessness in this matter ?

Or were they—these masters of expression—united by a common search after something in the alchemy of language above rules of grammar ? I think they used a singular verb with a plural nominative with a purpose, and that the reader who has taste and perception can see their aim and approve the means. This is the true ground on which we accept their authority in such cases : it is not that Shakespeare is Shakespeare, or Addison Addison ; it is that these masters of expression, unitedly or singly, discovered certain expressive effects at variance with syntax, but responsive to important subtleties of thought and feeling. No doubt it is difficult to formulate a proposition which lights up all the examples of violated rule which are given above. But one might try.

I suggest that this proposition might be

used as a kind of touchstone : *The singular verb is more intense than the plural verb.* I state it briefly, for the word " intense " may not fit every example. But when the singular verb would be more intense, significant, or comprehensive than the plural verb, because of certain subtleties of thought or expectation in the reader's mind, I suggest that it may be used with absolute justification. That such an expediency occurs in the Lord's Prayer I do not doubt. " Thine *is* the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." Here *is* is superior to *are* because it suggests by anticipation the attribution of a single thing—the all—not merely the things that are about to be named, but whatever else breath cannot name. It gives to the three words, " kingdom," " power," and " glory," a widely representative character, rendering needless the naming of other attributes, as, for example, the skill, the beauty, the justice, etc. To say, " Thine *are* the kingdom, the power, and the glory " is less comprehensive ; it savours of enumeration. Enumeration suggests the power to enumerate, and the right to withhold. It is a less devout ascription.

" And now *abideth* faith, hope, charity, these three." Here the singular verb suggests the

rigorousness of the final selection, and the individual greatness of the three. It is as though we read "And now abideth faith, abideth hope, abideth charity, these three." The superior magnetism and emphasis of the singular verb is the real origin of this departure from grammar. It is by a sympathetic inquiry into breaches of rule that we can discover whether the rule or its breaker is the greater culprit. The grammarian rarely makes such inquiry, and the grammaniac scouts it. The one expounds the rule, without insight; the other admits the exception, but without philosophy. We come to "Recessional." Mr. Kipling's use of the singular verb is justified, not merely by the fact that "tumult" and "shouting" combine to form one idea, but also by the higher consideration that the singular verb is more intense, and therefore more suited to a dignified and penetrating theme than the plural verb. "Dies" is a greater word than "die."

THE SPLIT INFINITIVE.

I have often received questions concerning the split infinitive—some from readers who wanted to know what a split infinitive is! Lucid and

amusing notes on the subject appear in the Society for Pure English Tract, No. 15 (Clarendon Press). The writer says that the English-speaking world may be divided into—

(1) Those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is.
(2) Those who do not know, but care very much.
(3) Those who know and condemn.
(4) Those who know and approve.
(5) Those who know and distinguish.

He adds that the splitting of the infinitive is "the interposition of an adverb between the preposition 'to' and the verb. Thus 'to thoroughly believe' is a split infinitive; 'to believe thoroughly' is not."

But, as the writer points out, many people, who know as much as this, distort their sentences in the effort to avoid split infinitives which do not exist. To steer clear of an imaginary rock they displace the adverb after the word "be" and produce such an awkward sentence as this:—

He was proposed at the last moment as a candidate likely *generally to be accepted*

under the delusion that they will split an infinitive if they write :—

> He was proposed at the last moment as a candidate likely *to be generally accepted.*

The infinitive is completed in " to be " ; and does not extend to the participle " accepted." It is wrong as a matter of taste, and wholly unnecessary in grammar, to write " Every citizen ought vitally to be concerned " instead of " Every citizen ought to be vitally concerned."

Where we are confronted simply with a verb and an adverb the question is more difficult. Convenience and clearness have to be taken into account. " To considerably improve the present wages of the miners " might just as well be written " To improve the wages of the miners considerably," avoiding a split infinitive. On the other hand, the writer points out, there is some loss of force and clearness in " to favour strongly " a given course of action, where the infinitive is not split, as compared with " to strongly favour," where it *is* split. A complete recasting of a sentence is often necessary to avoid a split infinitive, and the writer of the notes I am quoting asks whether the game is always worth

the candle. He instances the following as a justifiable split infinitive :—

"The Commission . . . has been feeling its way to modifications intended *to better equip* successful candidates for careers in India."

Rightly, I think, he points out that "better to equip" would be a too obvious evasion of a split infinitive; "to equip better" successful candidates is ambiguous because "better" may here be read, or at least tends to be read, as an adjective along with "successful" (better successful candidates); lastly, "to equip successful candidates better" lacks compactness.

In spite of all the dogmatists, I agree with the contention that we may split infinitives when to leave them unsplit involves ambiguity or artificiality. The following example is given :—

"With us outside the Treaty, we must expect the Commission to at least neglect our interests."

And the writer shows the difficulties which would arise from a too conscientious refusal to "split" :—

"*At least* cannot be put before *to* because it would then go with *Commission* (= the Commission, even if not other people), nor after *neglect* because it would then be doubtful whether it referred back to *neglect* or forward to *interests*, nor after *interests* because it would then

belong either to *interests* or to *neglect our interests*, neither being what is meant; where it stands, it secures our realising that the writer has in mind some other verb such as *injure* or *oppose* with which the weaker *neglect* is to be contrasted."

The justifiable split infinitive could hardly be better illustrated.

♣

The following lines were sent to me. Of their authorship I know nothing.

REPRIEVED.

" *The split infinitive is no longer avoided as a verbal crime.*"—WEEKLY PAPER.

" Time was when editors arose
In wrath none could assuage,
And rended into pieces those
Vile objects of their rage—
Contributors who chanced to give
Birth to a split infinitive!
(Such creatures THEN were thought unfit to live!)

" But times have changed: in prose and rhyme
Infinitives are split—
The miscreant commits no crime,
Nor is he told to 'git'!
No editor gets in a huff,
Vociferating: 'Stop! Enough'—
He merely murmurs: '*This is dashed good stuff!*' "

♣ ♣ ♣

"THE FORMER" AND "THE LATTER."

To say that these words should be avoided is perhaps a counsel of perfection, yet it should

never be necessary to refer the reader back by such awkward signposts ; and in practice " the former " and " the latter " are often placed so far from the words to which they relate that one has actually to suspend one's reading and grope back, with the result that a halt, if not an obscurity, occurs. These tiresome words are used to avoid repetition ; but the notion that repeated words are a blemish is a mere bogey, as Pascal long ago pointed out. You will not, I think, find " the former " and " the latter " in any clear and capable writer. If, for example, they can be discovered in the writings of Mr. Arnold Bennett, I shall be greatly surprised. I name him because effective repetition is one of his favourite devices. Opening his " Books and Persons " at random, I alight on these sentences about the poet Swinburne :—

" I knew by hearsay every crease in his trousers, but nobody had told me that his face was a vision that would never fade from my memory. And nobody, I found afterwards by inquiry, had noticed ' anything particular ' about his face."

Many a timid writer, I fear, would be capable of writing :—

" I knew by hearsay every crease in his trousers, but nobody had told me that his face was a vision that would never fade from my memory. And nobody, I found

afterwards, had noticed ' anything particular ' about the latter."

Dr. Johnson never wrote " the former " and " the latter " ; he once said to Dr. Burney, " As long as you have the use of your pen, never, Sir, be reduced to that shift."

♣ ♣ ♣

"COMMON OR GARDEN."

The secretary of a branch of the Y.M.C.A. asked me for the origin of this phrase. It is a rendering of the Latin *communis vel hortensis*, applied to many plants, insects, etc. In a humorous way it is often applied to other things.

♣ ♣ ♣

"WHAT THE DICKENS ! "

Has this phrase anything to do with Charles Dickens ? It is so associated by many people, but there can be no original connection, since " What the dickens ! " occurs in Shakespeare. Says Mrs. Page, in " The Merry Wives of Windsor " (Act III., Scene 2), " I cannot think what the dickens his name is my husband had him of. What do you call your knight's name, sirrah ? " Robin answers, " Sir John Falstaff." The occasional capital D in " What the dickens ? " may well have originated in the modern notion of a phrase which is of much

older origin. Probably " dickens " is a contraction of devilkins.

DEFINITE OR DEFINITIVE ?

A good many people have been puzzled in recent years by the use of the word *definitive* where they had expected the shorter and more familiar *definite*. An amusing instance of this feeling of uncertainty came to light during the railway strike of 1919. A party of Labour leaders was found at Unity House poring over dictionaries to find out what Sir Auckland Geddes meant by *definitive*. Mr. J. H. Thomas had asked the Government for a *definite* offer. When, in reply, he received a *definitive* offer, he asked himself in what the difference, if any, consisted. It became known afterwards that in the first draft of his important letter Sir Auckland had described the Government's offer as " definite," using the word which Mr. Thomas had invited him to use ; but when the letter was brought to him for signature he altered " definite " to " definitive," as being closer to his meaning.

By *definitive* Sir Auckland Geddes meant *final*. Why, then, did he not use this shorter and better understood word ? It is a pretty example of the difficulty of choosing exactly

the right word in a document which must take account of human susceptibilities. *Final* would have been perfectly clear. But then it might have been *too* clear. This word has harsh associations; it might have suggested the shutting of the door with a bang, whereas Sir Auckland wished to close it without provocative violence. On the other hand, *definite* would not have conveyed his intended idea of finality. A *definite* offer is a precise or unqualified offer, but not necessarily a final one. A *definitive* offer is both precise and final. It follows that in many contexts the two words cannot be interchanged. A " definitive edition " of a book is the last and most complete presentation of its text, but a " definite edition " means nothing. A definite statement is an exact statement; a definitive statement is an unalterable statement. It may be conceded that to-day *definite* and *definitive* can each suggest finality, though not in equal degrees or with equal safety.

♣ ♣ ♣

DR. JOHNSON *S'AMUSE.*

All the way from Los Angeles came a request for information concerning Dr. Johnson's eccentric or humorous definitions of certain words in the first edition of his Dictionary. Boswell

gives a list of these with comments and anecdotes. Johnson defined both *windward* and *leeward* as " towards the wind," whereas leeward is the exact opposite of windward. He gave as the meaning of *pastern* " the knee of a horse," and, when asked by a lady why he had done so, replied, " Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance." He corrected this definition in the fourth edition.

But he never altered his truculent definition of *Excise :* " A hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but by wretches hired by those to whom Excise is paid." This nearly brought on Johnson a prosecution for libel by the Commissioners of Excise, who took the opinion of the Attorney-General, Mr. Murray. That gentleman replied that " under all the circumstances I should think it better to give him an opportunity of altering his definition ; and, in case he do not, to threaten him with an information." There the matter ended.

Another famous definition was that which he gave of *Oats :* " A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people," to which Lord Elibank

afterwards smartly replied, " Very true, and where will you find such horses, and such *men ?* "

He defined *pension* as " an allowance made to anyone without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a State hireling for treason to his country." This definition came home to roost when, only seven years later, George III. granted Johnson a pension of the then splendid amount of £300 a year. His qualms were so great that he called on Sir Joshua Reynolds to ask him whether, after his definition of " pension," he could accept the Royal favour, and insisted that Reynolds should sleep on the question. Next day Reynolds told him that as the pension was offered explicitly for literary merit there could be no objection to his receiving it. He was further relieved from his dilemma by Lord Bute, who, when he had accepted it, said to him, " It is not given you for anything you are to do, but for what you have done." Considering the origin of his misgivings, Johnson was unconsciously funny when he said to Sheridan : " The English language does not afford me terms adequate to my feelings on this occasion. I must have recourse to the French. I am *pénétré* with His Majesty's goodness."

In a different category was the Doctor's definition of *network*, which has often been satirically quoted for its use of long words to express the meaning of a short one : " Anything reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections." But, as he pointed out, terms less abstruse than that which is to be explained cannot always be found. It is probable that since Johnson's time every lexicographer has been on his mettle when he came to define " network." I can imagine that the entire staff of Webster's Dictionary was convened to produce the following definition, which is certainly better than Johnson's : " A fabric or structure of threads, cords, wires, or the like, crossing each other at certain intervals, and knotted or secured at the crossings, thus leaving spaces, or meshes, between them." It is the hard words that puzzle a reader, the simple ones that puzzle a lexicographer. Have you ever tried to define *table*, *cup*, *boot ?*

GRAY'S " ELEGY."

" Are there not in existence certain stanzas which Gray wrote for his ' Elegy ' but did not include in it ; if so, can you quote them ? "

There are several such stanzas, and one or two

of them are as beautiful as they are interesting. The following four are found in one of Gray's original MSS. Their place in the poem was after the eighteenth stanza, beginning "The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide," and immediately before the nineteenth, beginning, "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." They are these :—

"The thoughtless world to Majesty may bow,
Exalt the brave, and idolize Success ;
But more to Innocence their safety owe
Than Power or Genius e'er conspired to bless.

"And thou, who, mindful of th' unhonoured Dead,
Dost in these notes their artless tale relate,
By night and lonely contemplation led
To wander in the gloomy walks of Fate :

"Hark how the sacred calm that breathes around
Bids ev'ry fierce tumultuous passion cease ;
In still small accents whisp'ring from the ground
A grateful earnest of eternal Peace.

"No more with Reason and thyself at strife,
Give anxious cares and endless wishes room,
But thro' the cool sequestered vale of life
Pursue the silent tenour of thy doom."

It will be observed that the second and fourth of these stanzas, re-written, appear in the "Elegy" as it is now printed. The third is worthy of

the entire poem, and so are two other rejected stanzas :—

" Him have we seen the greenwood side along,
While o'er the heath we hied, our labour done,
Oft as the woodlark piped her farewell song,
With wistful eyes pursue the setting sun.

" There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
By hands unseen are show'rs of violets found ;
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."

Probably no English poet has ever taken more pains to put a short poem into the best form than did Gray with his " Elegy." It was on his hands for fully seven years, for he began it at Stoke Poges in 1742, when he was twenty-six, wrought upon it at Cambridge, and finished it at Stoke in June, 1750, when he was still only thirty-four. It is said that the line " The ploughman homeward plods his weary way " cost Gray endless thought. And it well might, because it is capable of many variations without injury to rhyme or sense. A correspondent of *Notes and Queries* contributed to that journal seventy years ago eleven different readings of the line which, whatever the ultimate poetical effect of each may be, do not violate these conditions. Here they are :—

1. The weary ploughman plods his homeward way.
2. The weary ploughman homeward plods his way.

3. The ploughman, weary, plods his homeward way.
4. The ploughman, weary, homeward plods his way.
5. Weary the ploughman plods his homeward way.
6. Weary the ploughman homeward plods his way.
7. Homeward the ploughman plods his weary way.
8. Homeward the ploughman, weary, plods his way.
9. Homeward the weary ploughman plods his way.
10. The homeward ploughman, weary, plods his way.
11. The homeward ploughman plods his weary way.

The *Notes and Queries* correspondent was probably justified in doubting whether another line can be found the words of which admit of so many transpositions without altering the original meaning.

♣ ♣ ♣

THE PRINTER'S PET.

I was asked for the origin of the sign & as the contraction of *and*. It has a curious and somewhat disputed history. Skeat's explanation, however, is probably accurate. It was formerly the custom to print at the end of the alphabet these two symbols with their meanings : &c., *et cetera ;* & (*per se*) *and*, (*i.e.*, &, by itself, *and*). Children were taught to say " et-per-se-and " ; then *an* was substituted for *et* and the resulting word, with a little corruption, became " ampersand " or " amperżand." As for the form, &, it is said to have been a freakish way of writing the Latin *et* (and). Skeat says : " How

this is so I cannot here show without a diagram ; but anyone may see it repeatedly occurring in the Rushworth MS. at Oxford, or in any tolerably old Latin MS." School dames, however, saw in the form a resemblance to a sitting cat, and allowed their infant scholars to call it " and-pussy-and." Other corruptions have been " apples-and," " empuzad," " ampassy," and " ample-se-and."

I do not know when the following verses were written, or by whom, but they were quoted by a correspondent of *Notes and Queries* in the issue dated May 5th, 1877 :—

" Of all the types in a printer's hand
Commend me to the amperzand,
For he's the gentleman (seems to me)
Of the typographical companie.
O my nice little amperzand,
My graceful, swanlike amperzand !
Nothing that Cadmus ever planned
Equals my elegant amperzand.

" Many a letter you writers hate,
Ugly Q, with his tail so straight,
X, that makes you cross as a bear,
And Z, that helps you with 'zounds to swear.
But not my nice little amperzand,
My easily dashed-off amperzand ;
Any odd shape folks understand
To mean my Protean amperzand.

" Nothing for him that's starch or stiff ;
Never he's used in scold or tiff ;
State epistles so dull and grand
Mustn't contain the shortened ' and.'
No, my nice little amperzand,
You're good for those who are jolly and bland ;
In days when letters were dried with sand,
Old frumps wouldn't use my amperzand.

" But he is dear in old friendship's call,
Or when love is laughing through lady scrawl,
' Come & dine & have bachelor's fare,
Come & I'll keep you round & square.'
Yes, my nice little amperzand,
Never must into a word expand ;
Gentle sign of affection stand,
My kind familiar amperzand."

THE OMNIBUS.

The name of London's most popular and necessary vehicle has a curious history. Dictionaries coldly derive the word from the Latin without the pleasing legend that belongs to it. In an old French magazine may be found the story of a certain M. Baudry, who established in 1827 hot baths in a suburb of Nantes. Lacking customers, he sent, at fixed hours, a long car into the highways and hedges, or rather into the centre of the town, to induce them to come in. This was the first " omnibus." The name occurred to a friend of Baudry's, and it caught

the public fancy the more readily because a grocer of Nantes named Omnes had painted over his door the words " Omnes Omnibus " (Omnes for All). Taking a hint from his local success, Baudry started omnibuses in Paris, but the winter of 1829 made the streets slippery and forage dear, and he is said to have died of grief in consequence.

In that very year the first London omnibus ran from the Yorkshire Stingo, in Marylebone Road, to the Bank. London did not take kindly to the word " omnibus." " What is the plural ? " people asked ; and when Joseph Hume spoke in the House of Commons of *omnibi* there was the laughter called " much." The vehicles were long known as " Shillibeers," and if their proprietor, George Shillibeer, had not met with misfortune and taken to providing hearses, the name would probably have survived to this day. The " Shillibeers " carried twenty-two passengers ; the fare was a shilling. Newspapers and magazines were provided—not without reason, since the journey was slow, and there was a long half-way halt. In this generosity Shillibeer was outdone by a later owner, Mr. Cloud, who ran omnibuses between the Haymarket and Chelsea. Cloud placed a small,

well-chosen library in each of his omnibuses, so that he who rode might read standard authors. People rode to Hammersmith purposely to read these books. As they also stole them, this method of getting culture was not so expensive as it looks. The first free library was an omnibus.

♣ ♣ ♣

"UPLIFT."

This word—so weakly used in America to suggest moral elevation or stimulus—was discussed recently with pleasing irony by a *Times* leader-writer. He thought that the fact that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has made use of it in an address to Welshmen probably naturalised the word as an English noun. "Resistance to it, which has long been vain, has at last become undemocratic pedantry, and we must look for it henceforward in the poetry of future Tuppers." Well, more's the pity! "Uplift," as the *Times* writer says, is not in form or sound an ugly word; "less pleasant noises might easily have been chosen to express the same cloudy drift of moral vagueness. . . . Is an audience expected to respond to it by any specific action, or merely by that somnolent self-righteousness which is the *raison d'être* of a thousand contemporary leagues, societies,

groups, and unions, all devoted to perpetually eager and eternally hopeful futility ? Uplift, we suppose, is something more mundane than exaltation and more exalted than common sense." At the end of his light but needed castigation the writer aptly quotes Turgenev : " Nothing is stronger in the world . . . and weaker—than a word." " Uplift " is " hot air."

"LESSER."

A reader wrote : " I have been surprised to find the word ' lesser ' in several dictionaries—surprised because I had always considered that officially there was not such a word. Bartholomew and other map-makers chart such rivers as the ' Lesser Stour,' but otherwise it is seldom encountered."

" Lesser " was originally, and logically, incorrect, but it has been good English for centuries. It is a double comparative, brought into being to contrast euphoniously with " greater," as it does in Genesis i. : " And God made two great lights ; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night " ; and again in Ezekiel xliii. : " And from the lesser settle even to the greater settle shall be four cubits." Shakespeare has " lesser " no fewer than twenty-

six times in his plays, most often without the juxtaposition of "greater," and he even uses it as an adverb, as in "Troilus and Cressida": "Patience herself, what goddess e'er she be, doth lesser blanch at sufferance than I do." But lesser is now always an adjective.

WHERE DID SHAKESPEARE FIND HIS WORDS?

After pleading that William Shakespeare was himself, and that his plays are his and not some one else's, I received this letter:—

"Do you honestly believe that a country lad, with only the limited schooling of a country grammar school, who came up to London to earn his living, could acquire in the course of a few years the profound philosophy and the intellectual culture of a lifetime? Again, how could he, a man about town, an actor, a stage-manager, a frequenter of taverns, a courtier, have found the time for reading, study, and reflection necessary to have written these stupendous plays, which comprise a vocabulary of 21,000 words? Even Milton, who had a famous public school and 'Varsity education, acquired a vocabulary of only 7,000 words."

On the face of it, this challenge is reasonable. I have not verified my correspondent's figures, but I will accept them.

I do believe that Shakespeare, educated at a

country town grammar school, could and did achieve in a life of fifty-two years a vocabulary three times as big as that used by Milton, the most scholarly poet England has bred, in a lifetime of sixty-six years. It does not seem to me to be difficult to reconcile these degrees of opportunity with the proportions which have been found to exist between the vocabularies of the two poets. To me the difference only suggests that education had nothing to do with it. What are words? Whence do they come? Words are ideas made visible and audible. It seems, therefore, to be self-evident that a man's command of words will be proportionate to the *multitude and urgency of his ideas*.

Now, it is certain that the man who wrote the plays which we call Shakespeare's was a man whose ideas were multitudinous and urgent. On the basis of his vocabulary he has been claimed as a soldier, a sailor, a lawyer, a naturalist, a Continental traveller, and I know not what else. But these are mere speculations flying in the face of the well-recorded fact that the author of the plays was William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon, and was known as such by his friends and contem-

poraries. The evidence that he wrote the plays is the kind of evidence on which the personal identity and achievements of every one of us rests, and it is not to be upset by exclamations and wonderings on the miracle of his performance. It would have been a miracle in any man. Credit Shakespeare with ten times the learning he had, and, for me at least, the miracle would be the same. It is the miracle of genius.

The vocabulary of Shakespeare was equal to his genius, and it is so with every man. And it was because Shakespeare's need of a huge vocabulary was so much greater than Milton's that he became master of 21,000 words as against the later poet's 7,000 words. But, it will be asked, where did he learn these words? From books certainly, but at all times and in all places—in the street, in the tavern, in the theatre, in the purlieus of the Court, on the banks and wharves of the Thames, in and about the law courts—wherever men were gathered together. And they came to him with the multitude and urgency of his ideas. The world was his book, and it gave him more words than all literature gave to Milton.

Let us, however, try a little comparison. I will take three large-meaning words, each of which, for obvious reasons, Milton was certain to require, and did in fact use. These words shall be: WORLD, HELL and SEA. Here are lists of their occurrences in Milton and Shakespeare (I omit mere plurals and possessives in both cases):—

MILTON.	SHAKESPEARE.
World	World
Worldly	Worldling
	Worldly
	World-sharers
	World-wearied
	World-without-end
Hell	Hell
Hell-born	Hell-black
Hell-doom'd	Hell-fire
Hell-fire	Hell-gate
Hell-gate	Hell-governed
Hell-bounds	Hell-hated
Hellish	Hell-bound
	Hellish
	Hell-kite
	Hell-pains
Sea	Sea
Sea-beast	Sea-bank
Seafaring	Sea-boy
Sea-girt	Sea-cap
Sea-idol	Sea-coal

Milton.	Shakespeare.
Seamen	Seafarer
Sea-mews	Seafaring
Sea-monster	Sea-fight
Sea-nymphs	Sea-gown
Sea-paths	Sea-like
Sea-weed	Sea-maid
	Seaman
	Sea-marge
	Sea-mark
	Sea-mells
	Sea-monster
	Sea-room
	Sea-salt
	Sea-sick
	Seaside
	Sea-tost
	Sea-walled
	Sea-water
	Sea-wing

These lists will bear close examination. But it is not to the mere numerical difference that I call attention. Shakespeare's words smack of the world of men and of the things of every day. Alike by their number and their quality they suggest the multitude and urgency of his ideas, his necessity to know about life as it is lived. Milton used fewer words because the thrust of his ideas, and his spirit of intellectual adventure, as distinct from his intellectual stock, magnificent as it was, were inferior to Shakespeare's. Hence

his vocabulary was smaller. For in every man the word follows the idea.

♣ ♣ ♣

A, AN, AND THE ASPIRATE.

I have often been asked for a definite ruling as to the use of " an " before *h*. An inquirer wrote : " I always understood at school that ' an ' could be placed only before a vowel or mute *h*. Yet I often see ' an ' placed before such words as ' historian,' ' heroic,' etc."

♣

A definite ruling is neither possible nor desirable. The general law is that " an " is used before a vowel or a silent *h*. On the other hand, many grammars lay it down that " an " should be used before *h* when it is *semi*-silent. Nesfield says : " We say *a* history because the accent is on the first syllable, *his*, and the *h* is distinctly sounded ; but we say ' *an* historical account ' because here the accent is on the *second* syllable *tor*, and the *h* is practically silent." But different practices are found in good writers, and taste and preference have their way. There are some who insist on using " an " before certain words beginning with the sound *U*, yet they do not think of prefixing it to others. They will write " an European," " an universal,"

but they do not say, or write, " an use " or " an youth."

To return to the aspirate : according to the grammarians we ought to say " an historical," " an habitual," because the stressing of the second syllable in such words renders the *h* " practically silent." Well, it does for some people, but not for all. There are good judges, who are probably also good aspirators, who defend " a historical fact " and " a heroic deed." I am of this persuasion. I do *not* say " an heroic deed," " an hysterical woman," " an hypothesis," or " an hereafter." When I was younger most people said " an hotel " ; now the practice is mixed. And the same thing has happened with " hospital." In these and other instances the question whether an *h* is aspirated or silent is still unsettled as a matter of correct pronunciation. " Humble " is still pronounced " 'umble," though I should hope rarely. " Herb " is also still " 'erb " or " *h*erb." Where changes of practice have come about, they are rarely consistent. For example, " an hundred " in the Authorised Version becomes " a hundred " in the Revised Version, but " an hungered " is retained.

Probably many people have barely noticed

that in the Bible nearly every word beginning with *h* takes "an," whether the *h* is aspirated or not. What a change is here! Only when we are reading the Bible aloud do we say "*an* heavenly country," "*an* herald cried aloud," "*an* high look and proud heart," "the multitude of *an* host," "and Joshua burnt Ai and made it *an* heap for ever," "*an* holy one," "and I will make them *an* hissing," "there shall be *an* hole at the top of it." It is true that the Authorised Version is inconsistent in its use of "a" or "an"; for we have "a hole" and "an hole," "a heap" and "an heap," "a hundred" and "an hundred," and so on. The like inconsistencies are numerous in the Prayer Book. Personally, I hope that every "an" in the Bible will be preserved for ever: it is one thing to repeal a law, another to destroy the document.

Such are some of the difficulties. And I was asked to give "a definite ruling"! There can be no such thing, for there will never be either "a united" or "an united" opinion until our glorious language, and with it our national genius, is as dead as mutton.

WORDS OF ONE SYLLABLE.

My friend, Dr. Frank H. Vizetelly, editor of the Funk and Wagnall's "New Standard

Dictionary," has made an interesting list of Two Thousand Simple Words of One Syllable that Every One Should Know. This regiment of dwarf words forms a curious study. We are apt to think that we know the meaning of every word of one syllable. Of course, a moment's reflection shows the absurdity of such a belief. There is no reasonable basis for it, beyond the fact that many of the simplest words are, in fact, words of one syllable. But there are many scores of such words whose meanings are not generally known, and, if I was ever under the singular delusion I have mentioned, Dr. Vizetelly's list of monosyllables has sent me to a back seat. I know the meanings of most of the following words, but I have had to go to my dictionary to discover many others.

I have mixed both classes up in the following catalogue of words of one syllable. Do you know the meanings of *all* the following supposedly simple words ?

Auln	Crum	Foss
Boll	Dill	Glair
Brack	Drub	Glebe
Calx	Ell	Grouch
Caph	Fadge	Grum
Chinch	Fief	Gurge
Chints	Fitch	Heft
Chyle	Fleer	Holm

Hunks	Milt	Shad
Kale	Nard	Shote
Knab	Neap	Shruff
Knurl	Node	Sine
Lear	Orts	Siss
Lobe	Polt	Spume
Loo	Puke	Steer
Luke	Quern	Tierce
Lye	Quoif	Tine
Marl	Scrimp	Yawl

Some of these words are "rare," a few are "obsolete"; but one loves to see a rare or obsolete word revived if it can be done with effect and without pedantry. I confess to my total previous ignorance of such words as *gurge*, *knurl*, *knab*, *shote*, and *shruff*.

♣ ♣ ♣

"NO" AND "NOT ANY."

Over-anxiety about grammar and points of speech can become a nervous disease. A startling example of such jumpiness reached me from a reader who said that he had been admonished by the unco' correct for using such phrases as "I have no knowledge," "I have received no letters," "There is no doubt," etc., on the ground that this use of *no* is ungrammatical and illogical, and that the right expression is *not any*.

He had searched grammar books in vain for his defence, and appealed for help.

This ludicrous objection arises, I suppose, from the irrelevant thought that we do not say "I have *yes* knowledge," etc., and from forgetting that there are several "*no's*" in the language with different meanings. "No" actually means "not any"—as in Isaiah: "There is no beauty that we should desire him"; as in Shakespeare: "And then they say, no spirit dare stir abroad; then no planets strike, no fairy takes"; as in Keats: "No hungry generations tread thee down"; and as in all our literature, world without end. "No" is here a contraction of "none," which is a contraction of "no one" and "not one," and by consequences means "not any." Chaucer uses "no" before a consonant, as in "no man," and "none" before a vowel (for euphony) as in "noon apothecarie," *i.e.*, no apothecary.

GRAMMAR WITHOUT GROANS.

If people would read William Cobbett's century-old "English Grammar" they would become grammarians as easily as they become Dickensians by reading Dickens's novels. And

Cobbett's Grammar is more entertaining than many novels of to-day. He wrote it in 1818, while he was an exile from England, in Long Island, New York, in the form of a series of letters to his little son, James Paul Cobbett, whom he had left at home. Cobbett had only one way of doing things, his own, and his Grammar is unlike any other. He brought to it his contempt for form, his passion for *re*form, his "plain man" attitude, his stampeding common sense, and his whole menagerie of hatreds and aversions. In short, he made Grammar "hum." Nor was he in doubt about his achievement. He wrote :—

"For me not to say that I deem my English Grammar the best book for teaching this science, would be affectation, and neglect of duty besides ; because I know that it is the best ; because I wrote it for the purpose ; and because hundreds and hundreds of men and women have told me, some verbally, and some by letter, that though (many of them) at grammar schools for years, they really never *knew* anything of grammar till they studied my book."

Cobbett teaches grammar not as the scribes, who "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne," but as a man of the world, and as a controversialist whose bright instrument is the language whose use he proposes to explain.

His method is based on the seizure of broad working principles, and for him the heart of the matter is in the meaning of words and their effect ; he will classify nothing for classification's sake, label nothing for the learned label's sake, being of opinion that the sense of words and their logical representation of thought are at the root of the matter. A soldier in his youth, he lived before the age of barbed wire—an invention which the grammarians have applied on their own front with such perverted ingenuity that in a modern grammar you cannot see the road for the sign-posts, with their delirious directions : *Adjective Clauses*, *Reflexive Pronouns*, *Gerundial Infinitives*, *Dative Absolutes*, *Participial Prepositions*, *and Factitive Verbs*. Cobbett has no use for such terrifying terms. Himself never " indefinite," but always " demonstrative," his aim is to teach people to see into the life of words and sentences and thus learn to use them by using them.

In the same spirit he tells his boy never to attempt to get his grammar by rote. This, indeed, is the essence of his teaching. Reason, not memory, is the key. But the schoolmaster, seeking for visible and audible results, has compelled his pupils to commit to memory a mass of

rules, exceptions, lists, and definitions which, when learned as such in the schoolroom, they know not how to apply in the world. In his twelfth letter Cobbett writes to his boy :—

"It is this mode of teaching, which is practised in great schools, that assists very much in making dunces of Lords and County Squires."

Now we know why Cobbett's excellent Grammar has not been adopted in our public schools !

"BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA!"

The origin of this expression is obscure. Hazlitt, in his "English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases," gives it in an old form, "Between the devil and the Dead Sea." In its present form the expression occurs as early as 1637 in an account by Colonel Munro of his "Expedition with Mackay's Regiment" under Gustavus Adolphus. Referring to an awkward stage of the battle, he says that he and his men were kept "betwixt the devill and the deepe sea." The Romans had a similar proverb, substituting a precipice for the sea and a wolf for the devil. The French have "être entre l'enclume et le marteau" (to be between the anvil and the

hammer), which again has a Latin equivalent, "inter incudem et malleum." Shakespeare, in 'King Lear," has the same general idea :—

> "Thoud'st shun a bear :
> But if thy flight lay towards the raging sea,
> Thoud'st meet the bear in the mouth."

♣ ♣ ♣

"A MESS OF POTTAGE."

"Where does this phrase occur?" I was asked by a reader, who said that three clergymen to whom he had put the question had lifted their eyes and murmured "Esau sold. . . ." Did they imagine that they were quoting from the book of Genesis? They were not quoting the Authorised Version. But the words appeared at the head of Genesis xxv. in Matthew's Bible of 1537, thus : "Esaw selleth his byrthright for a messe of pottage." The same heading appears in the famous Breeches Bible of 1589.

♣ ♣ ♣

"ANA."

"What is the exact meaning of 'ana'? Is it properly used in 'gloviana' and 'boxiana,' as headings for columns of trade news in papers devoted to glove-making and box-making, or should it be used only with proper names, as

' Johnsoniana,' when quoting Johnson's actual sayings or writings ? "

" Ana " is both a word (meaning literary scraps and brevities) and a suffix, and it is from the suffix that the word has sprung. It is the neutral plural of the Latin termination " anus," which denotes belonging or pertaining to. *Urb-anus* means pertaining to a city, and *urb-ana* would mean things pertaining to a city.

But this suffix remains so distinctively Latin that it cannot be attached elegantly to English words except under restrictions which practice has shown to be necessary. Its use is a licence, and it has generally been employed as a suffix only to proper names, as in Shakespeariana, Johnsoniana, Americana, Dickensiana, etc., but even here there is a limit. Who would write Goldsmithiana or Lambiana ? The use of " ana " in " Shakespeariana " does not imply that the items relating to Shakespeare are his own sayings or writings. Any set of collected notes, anecdotes, dates, or facts relating to Shakespeare is " Shakespeariana." Used separately, " ana " is now an English noun, and was included by Dr. Johnson in his Dictionary ; its meaning I have indicated. It was never a noun in Latin, and was first adopted as one by

the French to denote a collection of sayings. "Gloviana," "Boxiana," and the like, are hardly defensible forms, but they will pass as semi-jocose coinages in trade papers.

♣ ♣ ♣

BALM IN GILEAD.

I was asked for an explanation of the phrase, "balm of Gilead." It will be found in the book of Jeremiah, viii. 22, where the prophet cries, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" Evidently there *was* balm in Gilead because later (xlvi. 11), he says: "Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt." Long before this the author of the book of Genesis had written: "And they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh." In the Breeches Bible of 1589 the phrase takes the curious form, "Is there no treacle in Gilead?"

♣ ♣ ♣

WHY "CANNOT"?

"Why are the words *can not* almost invariably written as one word? We do not write *maynot* and *shallnot*. Why *cannot?*"

The answer suggests itself at once. The

conjunction of the two *n's* in two monosyllabic words is a little awkward on the tongue, and we have almost unconsciously remedied the slight inconvenience by uniting the words and stressing the first. " Maybe " however is common, and in the Authorised Version of the Bible *shall be* was formerly printed " shalbe."

I may recall the admirable ironic lines of Charles Stuart Calverley, entitled " Forever." They were inspired by the introduction of this Americanism into English use, which occurred only some fifty years ago. " Forever " cannot, I think, be justified, any more than " forgood " or " forworse." These are some of Calverley's lines :—

" Forever ! 'Tis a single word !
Our rude forefathers deemed it two.
Can you imagine so absurd
A view ?

" Forever ! What abysms of woe
The word reveals, what frenzy, what
Despair ! For ever (printed so)
Did not.

" O thou to whom it first occurr'd
To solder the disjoin'd, and dower
Thy native language with a word
Of power ;

" We bless thee ! Whether far or near
Thy dwelling, whether dark or fair
Thy kingly brow, is neither here
Nor there.

" But in men's hearts shall be thy throne
While the great pulse of England beats :
Thou coiner of a word unknown
To Keats !

" And nevermore must printer do
As men did long ago ; but run
' For ' into ' ever,' bidding two
Be one.

" Forever ! passion-fraught, it throws
O'er the dim page a gloom, a glamour :
It's sweet, it's strange ; and I suppose
It's grammar.

" Forever ! 'Tis a single word !
And yet our fathers deem'd it two :
Nor am I confident they err'd ;
Are you ? "

♣ ♣ ♣

"GIGS" AND "GIGMANITY."

This curious word has passed into the dictionaries from Carlyle, who used it to signify all the forces of respectable, smug, *laissez-faire* society. He came by it in reading the reports of John Thurtell's trial for the murder of William Weare in Gill's Lane, near Elstree, Hertfordshire, on October 23rd, 1823. No English murder trial, perhaps, has left so many

traces in our literature. The story drew Sir Walter Scott out of his way to the lonely place where it was enacted, gave pause to the epistolary pen of Charles Lamb, suggested a thrilling chapter in Lord Lytton's "Pelham," added a word to Carlyle's vocabulary, became an episode in George Borrow's "Lavengro," and inspired a poem, John Milford's "The Owl," which is hardly inferior to Hood's "Dream of Eugene Aram."

Carlyle's use of the word "gig" as a synonym of respectability had its origin in the following dialogue between counsel and a witness during Thurtell's trial :—

"'What sort of person was Mr. Weare?'
'He was always a respectable person.'
'What do you mean by respectable?'
'He kept a gig.'"

Carlyle's sardonic humour seized on this, and whenever he was storming at respectabilities and unrealities gigs were not far from his mind. They were henceforth among his literary properties, and he uses them in the grandiose conclusion of his "French Revolution" :—

"Metal Images are molten; the marble Images become mortar-lime; the stone Mountains sulkily explode. RESPECTABILITY, with all her collected Gigs, inflamed for funeral pyre, leaves the Earth; not to

return save under new Avator. . . . For it is the end of the dominion of IMPOSTURE (which is Darkness and opaque Fire-damp), and the burning up with unquenchable fire of all the Gigs that are in the Earth."

There is an even more striking allusion in his essay on Richter.

WHEN WE TALK LATIN.

A young reader wrote to me to complain that Latin quotations in leading articles and elsewhere irritate him, and he suggested that in these days, when knowledge of Latin is decreasing rather than increasing, it is time to put away old " tags " like " nil admirari," " ore rotundo," " lex talionis," " dulce est desipere ir loco," " O ! si sic omnia," and the like. He adds : " Frankly, I know no Latin, and I cannot see why we should go on sticking it like spangles on good English."

I am afraid that I can agree within only narrow limits. Some of these " tags " are overdone. But they tend of themselves to disappear into translations. " Let the shoemaker stick to his last " is now more often written than " Ne sutor ultra crepidam," and " Let justice be done though the heavens fall " than " Fiat

justitia, ruat cœlum." But my friend knows a great deal more Latin than he knows he knows. M. Jourdain (in Molière's play) learned in middle life, to his astonishment, that he had been talking prose all his life without knowing it. My inquirer had talked pure Latin all his life, though he did not know it. I am not referring to English words derived from and resembling their Latin roots, but to pure Latin which is now, to all intents and purposes, pure English and does not need any indication by italics or quotation marks.

Probably few people realise how great is the number of these Latin survivals or how familiar they are in use. It may be worth while to make a list of a number of words, and even phrases, which, though simply Latin, are now hardly recognised as such. One could make it very much longer :—

Addendum	Bonus	Dictum
Afflatus	Caveat	Et cætera
Agenda	Censor	Exit
Alias	Colossus	Extempore
Alibi	Crux	Facetiæ
Alma mater	Curriculum	Fiat
Anno Domini	Data	Finis
Aurora	Delirium tremens	Genius
Bonâ fide	Desideratum	Gratis

Ignoramus	Ne plus ultra	Sanctum
Impedimenta	Non sequitur	Sine qua non
In camera	Obiter dictum	Status quo
Index	Omnibus	Stratum
In re	Opprobrium	Sub judice
Inter alia	Opus	Subpœna
Interim	Pabulum	Sub rosa
In toto	Par	Summum bonum
Janitor	Post (after)	Terminus
Locum tenens	Pro rata	Terra firma
Magnum	Quantum	Ultimatum
Major	Quasi	Vacuum
Maximum	Quid pro quo	Verbatim
Minor	Quorum	Vice versâ
Minimum	Quota	Vide
Memento	Ratio	Vim
Minutiæ	Regalia	Viva voce
Nebulæ	Requiem	Vox populi

Such a list, as I have said, could be extended greatly.

There are a great number of Latin phrases and quotations which, though not quite so widely understood, are virtually necessary to the language because they have never been effectively translated for passing or casual use. They are portmanteau phrases which have not been improved on, and which convey what is meant more briefly and forcibly

than equivalent English expressions could do. Of such are the following :—

Annus mirabilis : a year of wonders.
Apologia pro vita sua : a defence of a personal career or of the conduct of his life.
Casus belli : a cause or reason for war.
Compos mentis : of sound mind.
De facto : in fact, by virtue of the fact.
De profundis : out of the depths.
De novo : from the beginning again.
Deus ex machina : a god out of the machine.
Disjecta membra : scattered parts or fragments.
Ex libris : from the books of.
Ex cathedrâ : from the chair, with authority.
Exeunt omnes : all go out.
Ex officio : by virtue of his office.
Facile princeps : an easy first.
Felo de se : a felon upon himself (applied to certain suicides).
Fidus Achates : a faithful friend.
Floreat Etona : may Eton flourish.
Fortiter in re : strong in action.
Genius loci : the genius or peculiar character of a place.
In medias res : into the midst of things.
In situ : in the position or situation.
Ipso facto : by the fact or deed referred to.
Locus standi : the right to appear or intervene.
Multum in parvo : much in little.
Mutatis mutandis : the needful changes being made.
O tempora ! O mores ! : Oh the times ! Oh the manners !
Pari passu : side by side.
Peccavi : I have sinned.

Persona grata : a welcome person.
Primâ facie : at first sight, on the face of it.
Pro bono publico : for the public good.
Quid pro quo : value for value, tit for tat.
Reductio ad absurdum : the reduction of an argument to an absurdity.
Rus in urbe : the country in town.
Sui generis : of its own kind or class.
Summum bonum : the greatest good.
Suppressio veri : a suppression of the truth.
Terra incognita : an unknown land.
Tot homines, quot sententiæ : so many men, so many opinions.
Viva voce : orally, by the voice heard.

It may be objected that all these phrases can be translated into clear English, but it will be found that they cannot be rendered into English words and phrases so convenient and adaptable to literary purposes and neat sentences as their Latin equivalents. As I have already pointed out, when Latin " tags " can be aptly and crisply translated, their use tends to die out. " Ars longa, vita brevis " may well give place to Longfellow's " Art is long and time is fleeting " ; " Bis dat qui cito dat " to " He gives twice who gives quickly " ; " Cum grano salis " to " With a pinch of salt " ; " Dum spiro, spero " to " Where there is life there is hope " ; " Ex nihil nihil fit " to " Out of nothing nothing

comes " ; and " Poeta nascitur, non fit " to " The poet is born, not made." But, when all is said, a Latin " tag " has one great and inalienable quality : it has survived because it is charged with the wisdom and observation of long ages. It registers the antiquity of a truth which is new for each generation.

IS " NEWS " PLURAL OR SINGULAR ?

" News " is now singular, but of old it was often plural, as in Dryden : " The amazing news of Charles at once were spread." Shelley could write, " There are bad news from Palermo," and Scott makes one of his characters say, " Tell me, are your news of a sad or pleasant complexion ? " So late a writer as Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote, " News have come to me respecting a dear friend " ; yet so early a one as Milton makes " news " singular as we make it to-day : " Evil news rides post, while good news baits."

" IS " OR " WAS " ?

From a recent Socialist Labour Party manifesto : " Capital is responsible for almost 1,600,000 unemployed in 1922." " Capital is responsible for 188,000 workers on short time in

1922." The writer of the manifesto contended that "*is*" was correct. A friend of his thought that "*was*" would have been correct. "Is" is not only correct, but better than "was" from the point of view taken in the manifesto—the justice of which I do not discuss. Responsibility survives the event.

♣ ♣ ♣

"SO SHE WENT INTO THE GARDEN."

"Panjandrum," a purely arbitrary word, was invented by Foote to test the word-memory of his brother-actor, Macklin. The sentence in which it occurs is as follows :—

"So she went into the garden to cut a cabbage leaf to make an apple pie; and at the same time a great she-bear, coming up the street, popped his head into the shop. 'What! no soap?' So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber; and there were present Picninnies, and the Jobillilies, and the Garyulies, and the Grand Panjandrum himself, with the little round button at top, and they all fell to playing the game of catch-as-catch-can, till the gunpowder ran out at the heel of the boots."

It may seem easy to commit these words to memory, but they contain traps.

♣ ♣ ♣

"THE SIN OF WHICHCRAFT."

A correspondent wished for a definition of "whichcraft" and explained himself thus :—

"I have read that it is incorrect to use the word *and*

before *which*, but it seems to me necessary sometimes. For instance, if I say 'We startled a dog which was gnawing a bone, which ran off on our approach,' it is nonsense. But if I insert *and* before the second *which*, my meaning is clear."

It can be both correct and incorrect to place *and* before *which*. It is correct where the same antecedent noun, to which "which" is relative, is maintained and signified. It is correct and allowable to write, "We startled a dog which was gnawing a bone, and which ran off on our approach." But it would be grossly incorrect to say: "We startled a dog in the act of gnawing a bone, and which ran off," etc., because here there is no proper antecedent to "which"—the relation of "which" to the antecedent "dog" not having been grammatically created. There is, perhaps, no surer sign of illiteracy than this abuse of "and which." If each *which* is tethered to the same antecedent, "and which" can be repeated three or four times in one sentence (I do not say gracefully), but only under this condition can the series be written. When written thus "*and which*" is good grammar, but it is a creaky usage and best avoided.

♣ ♣ ♣

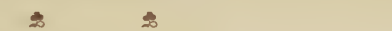
"BY THIS MEANS."

A Manchester man wrote:

"Often, when reference is made to certain codified

instructions, or a speaker has given a summary of several ideas, the ending is invariably, 'and by this means——.' Would it be pedantic to vary this (if an idiom) by stating, 'by this means' or 'by these means'?"

Each expression is correct in dependence on the shade of meaning which the speaker wishes to convey—whether he wishes to remind his hearers of each and every device he has proposed or of his plan in general. Such questions must be settled by the context.



WELL COINED.

An interesting little book or studied vocabulary could be written on word-coinages by distinguished writers groping for means of exact expression. Two such words are *altruism* and *agnostic*. The first was invented by Comte, the founder of Positivism, and to-day one meets with it everywhere. Altruism is not exactly the opposite of selfishness; it is the opposite of egotism, and its derivation makes it the literal equivalent of *other*-ism, as opposed to *I*-ism; it is simply the French *autrui-isme*, only that Comte adopted the Italian *altrui*, no doubt as being more euphonic. Mr. Ernest Weekley ("Etymological Dictionary of Modern English") thinks that "altruism" was first used in 1853 by George Lewes.

" Agnostic " was Professor Huxley's coinage, and is an Anglicisation of the Greek *agnostos*, unknowing, unknowable. The late Dr. Murray discovered this origin for the " New English Dictionary " after " a considerable chase." Huxley, who first used the word in 1869, afterwards definitely claimed it : " I . . . invented . . . the title of *agnostic*. It came into my head as suggestively antithetic to the ' gnostic ' of Church history, who professed to know so very much."

♣ ♣ ♣

WHAT IS " JACTITATION " ?

A distinguished friend who is interested in everything under the sun wrote to me : " In looking through the *British Dental Journal* the other day, while being gouged by the dentist, I came across an interesting paragraph about ' jactitation '—an unlikely place to find such a reference." He sent me the paragraph, which pointed out that this curious word has two meanings, or at any rate two applications. Its most usual occurrence is in the legal term " jactitation of marriage," but even here it is rarely heard, because the offence which bears this name is so seldom committed or brought into the Courts.

" Jactitation " is derived from the Latin verb *jactitare*, meaning to throw or toss about, and hence to produce in public, or utter boastfully abroad. There is obviously no reason why a man should not proclaim and boast about his marriage if he is so inclined, and the phrase " jactitation of marriage " is therefore applied to a *false* claim by a person who " boasts that he or she is married to another person whereby a refutation of their marriage may ensue." It is difficult for ordinary people to imagine the motives for such an offence ; nevertheless the offence exists and is provided for by the law as administered in the Divorce Court, where, on its being proved, an injunction of " perpetual silence " can be obtained against the offender.

The more material meaning of jactitation, a tossing about, survives in medicine. In dentistry, I think it should properly mean the heartless " tossing about " of one's own teeth when the dentist, drawing them at the rate of two a second, drops them like bombs on his linoleum. But it does not mean that, being used to describe, not the dentist's prowess, but his patient's " sudden, jerky movements which mark a deep stage of nitrous oxide anæsthesia."

The writer adds the thoughtful remark that the condition which it describes is not one that the dentist cares to see. I can believe it, having heard that the patient's final jactitation when he has not quite left unconsciousness or regained sanity sometimes leads him to knock the practitioner down or attempt to throw him out of the window.

"IN" OR "WITH."

I had an inquiry from a police-officer in a large city in the north of England, who wished to know which of the two following expressions is correct :—

"Being concerned with another man *in* stealing a quantity of butter," etc.

"Being concerned with another man *with* stealing a quantity of butter," etc.

Clearly *in stealing* is right and *with stealing* wrong. This police-officer—if he had the handling of the case—was himself concerned *with* the theft ; but I should be sorry to suggest that he was concerned *in* it.

"UP" AND "DOWN."

A Londoner wrote :

"I have often been puzzled by the proper uses

of the words 'up' and 'down' in such sentences as 'Am going *up* to town'; 'Are you going *down* to Birmingham?' etc. Should 'up' be used when one is going to a larger town or is it geographically used—*i.e.*, if the place be north or south of your position?"

I do not think that "up" and "down" have any original association with north or south. These terms originated in railway, or coaching, parlance, and are governed by the relative and conventional importance of the two ends of a journey. Thus in railway speech, a Manchester man would say "up to London," and a London man "down to Manchester." But whether a Manchester man would say, in practice, "up to Birmingham" may be a solemn question. Personally, I should not say (in London) that I was going "down to Liverpool," but "up to Liverpool." "Down to Liverpool" though correct in railway language, seems a thought glib and pompous. I should consider it an impertinence to announce to a Scot my intention to go "down to Edinburgh," even though Edinburgh is on the "down" line from London.

♣ ♣ ♣

THE "PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT."

An expression in constant use in recent years is "the psychological moment." It has been referred to the French *moment psychologique*,

taken as a moment psychically appropriate. But this, it appears, is a misunderstanding of the German "*psychologisches moment*," meaning psychological *momentum*, and so used for the first time by a Prussian newspaper in 1870, discussing the probable effect of the bombardment of Paris on the morale of the besieged. The "New English Dictionary" remarks that the phrase has "passed nonsensically into English journalese."

If this origin be the true one it is clear that in France and in England "momentum" became "moment," and that the meaning of the phrase correspondingly changed. So early as 1872 Jules Claretie used the phrase in a similar passage, but with the new meaning. He wrote in his "History of the Revolution of 1870–1": "The Prussians decided, in order to reduce the besieged town, to hasten the psychological moment by striking not only at fortified Mézières but at disarmed Charleville." In England, undoubtedly, the phrase has been too popular and too lightly used. Any interesting or exciting moment is called the "psychological moment," whether there is anything psychological about it or not. As a correspondent of *Notes and Queries* pointed out in 1909, it is used

as an imposing substitute for "the nick of time." He quotes from one of Mrs. B. M. Croker's novels, in which an angler says, "Give me the one psychological moment before the river rises . . . give me a fine day, a good sixteen-foot rod," etc. Here the phrase is typically abused. Another correspondent of *Notes and Queries* adduced evidence that the word "psychological" did not enter the language until 1828, coined, with apologies, by Coleridge, who said that it was a word of which the language had need. It is now, perhaps, a word of which the language has had enough.

♣ ♣ ♣

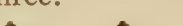
EITHER.

An over-anxious man wrote :—

"Have you noticed the modern misuse of the word 'either,' from the earlier and more correct use as meaning one or other of any number? It is frequently used in many sentences as meaning both or each of two or more, and in the majority of these the meaning is quite misleading and wrongly used."

I do not think that there is a misuse. The word "either" in the sense of both is a natural development of "either" in the sense of one or the other—as, for example, in Revelation xxii. 2 : "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side (*i.e.*, both sides) of the river, was there the

tree of life," or, as in " Paradise Lost " : " From either end (*i.e.*, both ends) of Heav'n the welkin burns." But " either " and " neither " should never be used of more than two objects or propositions. There is no such thing as either or neither of three.



" WHOEVER " AND " WHOMEVER."

An Argentine correspondent was puzzled, not without reason, by the current uses of " whoever " and " whomever." He saw the correctness of writing, " *Whoever* fights Dempsey will be beaten," and of writing " Dempsey will beat *whomever* he fights." But how about " Dempsey will beat *whoever* fights him " ? This, my correspondent said, looks wrong, because " whoever " is objective to " beat " ; yet " whomever " would also look wrong because it is nominative to " fights." I am not sure how a grammarian would deal with the point, but my view is that " Dempsey will beat whoever fights him " is correct, and that " *whoever* " is here justified by what grammarians themselves call Attraction. The pronoun is attracted from the objective to the nominative by virtue of its immediate relation to " fights." Moreover, the sense is, " Dempsey will beat any man, so ever, who fights him."

Another correspondent wrote :—

"I have had an argument with a friend over the following sentence : 'I went into the village and bought a hat from Mr. Brown, *whom* I saw was very ill.' Our discussion had been in connection with the word 'whom.' One of us thinks the sentence correct as written, and the other thinks the word 'who' should be employed instead of 'whom.'"

Who is correct, and *whom* wrong. The sense is "and bought a hat from Mr. Brown who (I saw) was very ill." Here the point is not that Mr. Brown was seen, but that he was seen to be ill.

♣ ♣ ♣

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is a grave literary offence, but it is much less common and, when found, usually far less important, than is supposed. A nose for plagiarism is often the mark of the dull critic or the too-clever reader. It is a standing wonder that people are interested in coincidences in life, but will hardly allow them to exist in literature. Yet coincidences in the expression of the same thought must be as common as blackberries. Moreover, literature, like life, is common stock, and, within certain limits and under conditions, it may be drawn upon.

♣

Tennyson, writing to a Canadian critic who

had accused him of plagiarising four lines from Shelley, said :—

" I do not object to your finding parallelisms. They must always occur. A man (a Chinese scholar) some time ago wrote to me saying that in an unknown, untranslated Chinese poem there were two whole lines of mine almost word for word. Why not ? Are not human eyes all over the world looking at the same objects, and must there not consequently be coincidences of thought and impressions and expressions ? It is scarcely possible for anyone to say or write anything in this late time of the world to which, in the rest of the literature of the world, a parallel could not somewhere be found. . . . I believe the resemblance which you note is just a chance one."

Apart from coincidence, there is unconscious memory. Even the hunt for " parallelisms," as the late Sir E. T. Cook shows, can be grossly overdone ; and Tennyson rightly protested that some literary detectives " will not allow one to say ' Ring the bell ' without finding that we have taken it from Sir P. Sidney, or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean ' roars ' without finding out the precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarised it." This second charge of plagiarism, he adds, had actually been made.

Those who doubt the frequency or reality of sheer coincidence in literature may ponder a

story of Rossetti. He had written in his poem, " Love's Nocturne " :—

> " Fair with honourable eyes
> Lamps of a pellucid soul."

Before he had seen his proofs, Browning's " Ring and the Book " came out, and in it Rossetti found the phrase " lustrous and pellucid soul." It was pure coincidence of necessity, but he foresaw the usual charge of plagiarism, and sacrificed his phrase rather than incur it.

THE CASE OF " CASE."

The word " case " is a capital example of the words which, rightly used, mean something, but, wrongly, nothing at all. Mr. R. W. Chapman, in an acute essay on " The Decay of Syntax " (contained in " The Portrait of a Scholar and Other Essays, written in Macedonia ") writes : " *Case* and *instance* are the commonest and most dangerous of a number of parasitic growths which are the dry rot of syntax."

The word *case* implies a conjunction of affairs, an opposition of interests, a relation of circumstances to one another. Thus you may write of " a case of conscience." But we are

not to write, " That is not the case," when all we mean is " That is not so " ; for a case is a position of things, relative to the things themselves or to the way in which they affect men. We shall find the word correctly used in the tenth verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, " His disciples say unto Him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry." The word is used with correctness by the Friar in " Much Ado About Nothing " when he is advising Leonato how to act for the vindication of his daughter : " Pause awhile and let my counsel sway you in this case." But, as Mr. Chapman points out, it is wrong to write, " It is not the case that Napoleon died of a broken heart," because no case has been stated.

♣ ♣ ♣

HOW TO WRITE CLEARLY.

An old editor relates how he taught one of his young men to write clearly. The young man had good abilities, but everything he wrote was confused and opaque, and no amount of advice seemed to do him good. At last the editor said, " You must really do better. Now, just you take this paragraph back and imagine that you have sitting in front of you the stupidest

man in the kingdom; then tell him in the simplest and clearest way you can what to put in the paragraph; and when you think you have made him understand, write down as clearly as possible what you said to him." The youth went away sadly, but an hour later he returned with his new revised version. It was a clear and forcible piece of writing. "Capital!" said the editor. "How did you manage to do it?" "Well, sir, I did what you told me. I sat down at the desk and fancied that you were sitting opposite me."

This story illustrates a fundamental fact about writing—namely, that it is one of the arts of *communication*. Many a man fails to write clearly, and is in difficulties the moment he puts pen to paper, because he forgets the purpose for which he is writing at all. He feels lonely and embarrassed. He is stuck. Doubtless a great part of the obstruction is self-consciousness. He is more conscious of his effort to write than of his reason for writing, which is that he wishes to *communicate* his thoughts to *some one else* through the medium of written or printed words. He has to realise that it takes two people to write clearly—the man with the pen and the man, a hundred miles away, who is going to read what

is written. The editor hit on the best means of putting his young and muddle-headed pupil into the right frame of mind. Clearness in writing comes mainly from an urgent wish to communicate thought, and not merely to express it. It is a law of human nature that the mind needs response ; in conversation we get it at once, with all the advantage of being able to alter, correct, or repeat what we say ; but in writing, where only one act of communication is possible, and response is deferred, a persistent effort to foresee the reader and imagine the workings of his mind is necessary.

It is much easier to write a clear letter than a clear essay or article, because in letter-writing the reader is easily visualised, and is sometimes all but present ; here writing is felt to be one with communication. When William Cobbett sat down to write his " Grammar of the English Language," to help his little son, Paul, he deliberately cast it into the form of a series of letters, not only to help his son, but to help his own mind to think out and communicate the rules of good writing. " I have put my work into the form of Letters in order that I might be continually reminded that I was addressing myself to persons who needed to be

spoken to with great clearness." There is a valuable hint here for unskilled writers. When in writing an article, or an essay, your ideas refuse to flow easily, and your words come slowly, it is a good plan to begin again and write the whole composition in the form, and in the spirit, of a letter to an actual person on whose sympathy you could count if the letter were intended to go by post. " My dear —— " will often set your pen running, and well begun is half done.

♣ ♣ ♣

A CHAIRMAN'S ENGLISH.

A reader submitted the following officia statement :—

" The minutes of the last committee meeting have just been read and the chairman, referring to them, says :—

" ' If in your opinion they are a true account of what took place at our last meeting and *that they be confirmed,* you will please vote in the usual way.' It is the underlined clause I object to, but will bow to your decision."

The chairman's sentence was not correctly worded. It would have been correct if it had begun, " If it is your opinion that . . ."

♣ ♣ ♣

MEN AND WOMEN IN THE DICTIONARY.

An interesting class of words is that composed of surnames and proper names which

have lodged themselves in the language. But, in his excellent and engrossing "Etymological Dictionary of the English Language," Professor Ernest Weekley dismisses one such word as alien to this class. Many of us have held, carelessly, that "*tramway*" and "*tramcar*" perpetuate the name of Mr. Outram, the reputed inventor of tramways. There is no doubt that this etymology is a myth. Mr. Weekley attributes its persistence to its inclusion in Dr. Smiles's "Life of George Stephenson," but it surely received more direct and dangerous support by its inclusion in Worcester's Dictionary (1859). There is plenty of room in which to dispute the actual derivation of "tram," which is probably from an old Scandinavian word, though some etymologists ally it to *train*. "Trams" were running in English collieries long before Outram was born, and the ailed roads on which they ran were "tramways."

There is no myth, however, in the similar derivation of *hansom-cab* from the inventor of that vehicle, Joseph Aloysius Hansom, who took out his patent in 1834; nor about the origin of *mackintosh* in the name of Charles Mackintosh, who patented his waterproof cloth

in 1823. His name, however, was Macintosh, according to the "Dictionary of National Biography." It is a mercy to his memory that the facetious corruption of "mackintosh" into "mucking-togs" did not last long, even with the assistance of Thomas Ingoldsby, whose "vulgar little boy" at Margate was seen "with a carpet-swab and mucking-togs and a hat turned up with green."

Within our own time no proper name has been converted into a word so successfully as that of Captain Boycott, of Lough Mask House, Co. Mayo, whose persecution by the Irish Land League in 1880 brought it into use. The remarkable thing is that the verb to *boycott* has passed into many European languages. "Boycotter" and "boycottage" are good French. Open a German dictionary and you will find "boycottieren." The Dutch have "boycotten," and a St. Petersburg correspondent of *Notes and Queries* sent the information that the word has made its way into Russian in the shapes of "boycottirovat" (to boycott) and "boycottirovanie" (boycotting). Captain Boycott died in 1897.

"*Dandy*" is a word whose origin is not too

clear. Mr. Weekley dates its first use from the Scottish border at the end of the eighteenth century, and considers it to be simply a form—which it certainly is in Scotland—of Andrew, as in Dandie Dinmont. The name, being so common, seems to have been adapted to various uses and combinations, just as Jack has been in England, and the two names are combined in "jack-a-dandy." Yet "jack-a-dandy" seems to be older than "dandy," for it occurs in Congreve's comedy, "The Confederacy" (1705).

The word "*tawdry*" is curiously derived. Its form is the result of what etymologists call an "aphetic" change—that is to say that by aphesis (literally, a letting-go) it has dropped its original first letter: "Tawdry" is Saint Audrey (St. Audrey), who, as patron saint of Ely, was known as Ethelreda. The word is a vulgar corruption of the name of this saintly lady, who is traditionally said to have died of a swelling in her throat, which she considered as a particular judgment on her for having in her youth been fond of necklaces. An annual fair in her honour was held on her day in the Isle of Ely, at which cheap toys and jewellery and knick-knacks were sold. Such articles came to be

associated with her name, and aphesis did the rest ; a country girl's showy but valueless necklace was called a *tawdry*.

" *Bunkum* " is really Buncombe, the name of a town in North Carolina. The story goes that a pompous orator, having bored the House of Representatives at Washington, was asked by a friend why he had made such a display. He replied, candidly, " I was not speaking to the House, I was speaking to Buncombe "—his exacting constituency.

" *Fahrenheit* " is another of these name words, being the name of the Prussian inventor of the thermometer ; it is, as Mr. Weekley points out, an abstract surname, like the Puritan names, Peace, Verity, etc. ; it means Experience.

" *Macadam*," is so called from the inventor of this method of road-making, who died in 1836, after doing a great work in the construction of roads in Great Britain on his own principle. In his lifetime the verb to " macadamise " was accepted, and this even by Southey, who wrote in one of his letters, " macadamising the streets of London is likely to prove quackadamising."

It proved nothing of the sort, and John Loudon Macadam well deserves his niche in the language.

♣ ♣ ♣

"DON'T!"

The originator of Mr. Punch's advice to those about to get married has been sought far and wide, and the most positive assertions have been made. Mr. M. H. Spielmann, whose history of *Punch* appeared in 1895, followed up many positive assertions, but found neither confirmation nor denial. In the end he ran it to earth in a *Punch* editor's pay-book which had been lost, and found that the author was "no other than Henry Mayhew, who, with Ebenezer Landells, the wood-engraver (the true inventor and first proprietor of the paper), was the chief founder and shaper of *Punch* as we know it." The joke was suggested by an advertisement that was widely published and known in the early days of *Punch*. A firm of house-furnishers issued their advertisements under the title: "Worthy of Attention—Advice to Those About to Marry"; the advice being to patronise their emporium. This was Mayhew's cue.

♣ ♣ ♣

QUOTATION MARKS.

I received this inquiry:—

"I recently commenced a sentence with the phrase,

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,' and from this point concluded with my own words. I did not, however, distinguish the quotation by inverted commas, and am informed that their omission was a breach of rule. But is not the use of quotation marks optional when the phrase used is well known and employed in the manner described ? "

My correspondent's disuse of quotation marks was justified. There are two forms of quotation : the direct and the allusive. This was allusive quotation. It is ridiculous to insist on quotation marks when and where their introduction, by reason of the familiarity of the quotation, is unnecessary. A writer is entitled to expect from his readers a certain knowledge of literature. He does little honour either to the author of the phrase he is quoting or to the reader whom he is addressing if he is so obsequious as to put between quotation marks such phrases as " To be or not to be," " unto this last," " temper justice with mercy," " that old man eloquent," " my better half," or " all hell broke loose." Each is a distinguished quotation, but each has entered the language.

♣ ♣ ♣

WHEN WE QUOTE SHAKESPEARE.

Sir Sidney Lee has shown how often English men and women quote Shakespeare, not knowing it, or forgetting. He points out that there

are several speeches in great scenes which have been broken up into common sayings almost to a word, and he instances Othello's speech :—

"I have done the State some service,
And they know it. No more of that. . . .
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice; then must you speak
Of one who loved not wisely but too well."

Isolated phrases which have passed from the Plays into current speech and writing are legion. Among them are these :—

"In my mind's eye."
"More in sorrow than in anger."
"The primrose path."
"A king of shreds and patches."
"The milk of human kindness."
"A ministering angel."
"A towering passion."
"A man more sinned against than sinning."
"Every inch a king."
"A divided duty."
"A foregone conclusion."
"Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war."

And besides phrases there are, of course, many whole sentences, such as :—

"The better part of valour is discretion."
"Brevity is the soul of wit."
"Assume a virtue if you have it not."
"The course of true love never did run smooth."

" Every why hath a wherefore."
" Though this be madness, there is method in it."
" Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

For many of these sayings we have no substitutes : they have become necessities of our thought and speech.

♣ ♣ ♣

WHEN WE MISQUOTE HIM.

But although we quote Shakespeare without remembering it, we also misquote him without knowing it. Shakespeare did not write " There's method in his madness," nor is this quite his meaning when he makes Polonius say, " Though this be madness, yet there is method in't." Nor did he write—

" to pale his *in*effectual fires "

when he was writing of the glow-worm ; he wrote " to pale his uneffectual fire," which is sense. He did not write—

" There's a Divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we *may*,"

but " how we will " ; nor—

" We are such stuff as dreams are made *of* " :

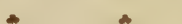
he wrote " on." He is constantly misquoted also in—

" I have supped full *of* horrors " ;

a perversion of Macbeth's " with horrors." His

" cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd " is also very generally misquoted as " cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd." Another bad distortion of Shakespeare is heard in " a beggarly array of empty bottles " ; he wrote " a beggarly account of empty boxes."

" *Imperial* Cæsar, dead and turned to clay " is found in many editions of " Hamlet," but not in the best. " Imperious " is the word in the quarto edition of the play, and is adopted by the best editors ; on the other hand, it is clear that " imperious " was often used by Shakespeare in the sense of " imperial."



MENTAL CONFUSION.

An ungrammatical sentence is always, in some way, an illogical or mis-thought sentence. To take a simple example :—

" I expected to have ploughed my land last Monday."

Here no resort to a rule of grammar should be necessary, because the sentence is clearly an example of faulty syntax due to inexact thinking. The above sentence means : " Last Monday I was in the act of expecting to have ploughed my land before that day," which is absurd. The actual meaning, of course, is that last Monday or before it, I was expecting to plough my land

on that day. The sentence, therefore, should read: "I expected to plough my land last Monday." This confusion of time, or rather times, is seen in a hundred similar expressions. A man will say:—

"I did not speak, yesterday, so well as I wished to have done."

The act of expecting being thrown into the past it becomes the present in relation to the thing expected, and the words should be: "I did not speak yesterday so well as I wished to do." Grammar, of course, comes along with her rule, which is this (I quote Nesfield's excellent "Errors in English Composition"): "The Present, not the Perfect, Infinitive should be used when the action denoted by the Infinitive is simultaneous with that denoted by the Finite verb going before." But Grammar is merely the policeman in reserve.

♣ ♣ ♣

THE DISPLACEMENT OF "ONLY."

There is no commoner error, or one more weakening to a sentence, than the separation of the word *only* from the word or words which it properly qualifies. "*This disastrous result can only be explained by supposing . . .*" should be "*This disastrous result can be explained only by*

supposing. . . ." It is impossible to take up a newspaper without finding many an *only* displaced with bad effect on the meaning. Yet Mr. Philip Bernard Ballard, in his excellent little book, "Teaching the Mother Tongue," takes sides with Dean Alford in deriding "the pedantic rules laid down for the position of *only* in the sentence." He defends the sentence "*I only had an apple for lunch to-day*," and pooh-poohs the objection that *only* limits *apple* and should therefore be placed before apple, thus, "*I had only an apple for lunch to-day*." Mr. Ballard said that objectors like myself are wrong, and contends that "had-an-apple-for-lunch-to-day" must be taken as a whole that is modified by *only*, and he concludes that the original sentence, "I only had an apple for lunch to-day" has no ambiguity about it, and cannot be misunderstood except by a mind debauched.

It is all a question of fitness, of logic. The form, "I only had an apple for lunch to-day" may be clear, but it is weak. It is unusual for a man to lunch off an apple, and the whole interest of the statement lies in the speaker's wish to communicate an *unusual* experience. What other could there be? "I only had an

apple for lunch to-day " obscures the element of remarkableness which is the point of the statement ; whereas " I had only an apple for lunch to-day " (that is, nothing but an apple) conveys the speaker's meaning and mood. A more exact speaker would probably not use the word " only " in either position : he would say " I had nothing but an apple for lunch to-day." Moreover, Mr. Ballard's example does not light up the whole matter. Would he write " The poor fellow only died last week " ? I feel certain that he would not. Still less would he write " The poor fellow only came home to die," if what he really meant was " came home only to die." Here the position of " only " in the sentence almost changes the meaning and certainly dilutes, if it does not distort, its effect.

THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE.

Mr. H. L. Mencken, in his book, " The American Language," is all for the use of the language of everyday life as the language of literature. This doctrine prospers more in the States than it will, for many a day, here. Take the American Declaration of Independence—" the most memorable public document which history records "—as newly framed by Mr.

Mencken. It was drafted by Thomas Jefferson, afterwards third President of the United States, in a style of great dignity. I quote its opening words, as being interesting in themselves, and will then give Mr. Mencken's proposed version. Jefferson's is this :—

"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. . . ."

♣

Now for Mr. Mencken :—

"When things get so balled up that the people of a country have to cut loose from some other country and go it on their own hook, without asking no permission from nobody, excepting maybe God Almighty, then they ought to let everybody know why they done it, so that everybody can see that they are on the level, and not trying to put nothing over on nobody. All we got to say on this proposition is this : you and me is as good as anybody else, and maybe a damn sight better ; second, nobody ain't got no right to take away none of our rights ; third, every man has got a right to live, to come and go as he pleases, and to have a good time however he likes, so long as he don't interfere with nobody else. That any government that don't give a man these rights ain't worth a damn ; also, people ought to choose the kind of

government they want themselves, and nobody else ought to have no say in the matter. . . ."

I hope that " these States " will suppress all such translations.

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

TWO WORDS IN ONE?

A correspondent wrote :—

" I frequently hear people say, ' I have had a haircut.' Is this correct ? By my friends I am considered pedantic for saying ' I have had my hair cut.' I have looked in several dictionaries, but have not been successful in finding ' haircut ' given as a noun, so why ' *a haircut* ' ? "

" Haircut " is not literary English, but it is one of those colloquialisms which may be said to be on the waiting-list to be included in good English. Structurally, it is sound. If we condemn it we should have to condemn " handshake," " earthquake," " landslide," and a good many like words which have long been accepted. It is not pedantic to say " I have had my hair cut," but it would be pedantic to carry the objection to " I have had a haircut " too far.

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

" EYETHER " OR " EETHER " ?

I was asked whether both these pronunciations are correct. I think they are. You may say " eyether " or " eether." Both pronuncia-

tions are heard from good speakers. Webster has an interesting note on the point: "The pronunciation *īther* is both American and English, but is more prevalent in England, especially in London and the South, than in America. In the seventeenth century the word was pronounced approximately *ather* . . . and according to the most reliable orthoepists of the period *īther* seems to have been the most preferred pronunciation following *ather* in the eighteenth century. According to Walker both *ēther* and *īther* were in general cultivated use by 1791, since which time the orthoepists have favoured *ēther* as being more generally preferred by good speakers." A curious but common pronunciation of "either" and "neither" was "owther" and "nowther," following the obsolete but good old English words "other" and "nother."

♣ ♣ ♣

THE ADVERTISER'S ARTFUL AID.

Professor Brander Matthews, of Columbia University, who is one of the brightest and most penetrating of American critics, has pointed out, in his "Essays on English," that of deliberate and careful word-coiners none is more ingenious than the advertiser, to whom a catchy and euphonious word which is yet derivable is of the

greatest importance. Many of the examples he gives, being American, are not too familiar here, but are curious. One of the simplest is "jello," a more advertisable form of "jelly." One might be long in detecting in "ampico" the elements of "American Piano Company," or in "nabisco" those of "National Biscuit Company." Such coinages have been carried a good deal farther in America than here, and Professor Matthews is able to quote an ode in the manner of Horace, and lacking nothing of metrical form, which is wholly composed of the advertised names of a number of American trade products. It is as follows :—

"ODE.

"Chipeco thermos dioxygen, temco sonora tuxedo
Resinol fiat bacardi, camera ansco wheatena ;
Antiskid pebeco calox, oleo tyco barometer postum
nabisco.
Prestolite arco congoleum, karo aluminium kryptok,
Crisco balopticon lysol, jello bellans, carborundum !
Ampico clysmic swoboda, pantasote necco Britannica
Encyclopedia ?"

Paraphrasing a famous passage of Sydney Smith's, the author says : "The American, after sleeping on an advertised mattress, gets out of an advertised bed, and stands on an advertised carpet. In the bathroom he uses an advertised soap and an advertised tooth-paste. He puts

on his advertised shoes and his advertised suit of clothes . . ." and so on. I suspect that he lies at last in an advertised coffin.

A very young correspondent, a Lancashire schoolboy, thought it no more difficult to "fake" an Horatian Ode from British trade names than from the greater number and variety of American, and he sent me the following lines of his own composing :—

"Lux hovis wincarnis, sanatogen kliptiko veda !
Maltina germolene ronuk, icilma sanitas vim
Cicfa ; cusaline volex clensel, seccotine croid
Castrol salvolia.

"Farola onoto, harlene meccano zambuk britolic.
Kodak fluxite ficolax, atora sorbo cuticura
Anzora ; abdine sargol clemak antipon
Actina genasprin !"

It might be supposed that the owner of a proprietary article is entitled to call it by what name he pleases, but this is not so. The Patent Office issues "Instructions to Persons Who Wish to Register Trade Marks." The most important rule for the framing of trade names, or Word Marks, as they are called, is that such a word or words shall have *no direct reference to the character or quality of the goods, and must not be in its ordinary signification a*

geographical name or a surname. The reason for this regulation is obvious. A trade mark must not appropriate meanings which would cause detriment to earlier or later producers of similar goods ; in other words, although it is adopted for advertising purposes, it must not itself be an advertisement.

♣ ♣ ♣

THE FUNCTION OF "FUNCTION."

Is it correct to write :—

"The council declined to function." "The car had travelled half the distance when the engine refused to function," etc.?

The use of "function" as a verb is perhaps admissible in writing of machinery, but quite improper in such a sentence as "The council declined to function" ; and the use of the word as a noun, to mean any kind of assembly or social activity, such as a garden-party or a reception, is as indefensible as it is common.

♣ ♣ ♣

MILTON QUESTIONED.

A correspondent wrote to ask whether Milton was correct when he wrote :—

"'Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, *both them who stood and them who failed ;*
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.'

Would it not sound better to the modern ear to say, 'both those who stood and those who failed'? The passage will be found in Book III., line 100, of 'Paradise Lost.'"

Milton's grammar was certainly correct, and "those" (for "them") does not sound better to a modern ear that is conscious of literary effect. The drum-beat effect of the two "thems" is of great importance to the lines. Alter "them" to "those" and you lose half the effect.

♣ ♣ ♣

WORDS AND THEIR MEANINGS.

In his book, "The Analysis of Mind," Mr. Bertrand Russell has an interesting chapter on the relation of words to their meanings. He says :—

"It is not necessary, in order that a man should 'understand' a word, that he should 'know what it means,' in the sense of being able to say 'this word means so-and-so.' Understanding words does not consist in knowing their dictionary definitions, or in being able to specify the objects to which they are appropriate. Such understanding as this may belong to lexicographers and students, but not to ordinary mortals in ordinary life. . . . The use of the word comes first, and the meaning is to be distilled out of it by observation and analysis."

How true this is becomes clear when we consider very simple words which all men use

correctly and no one but a lexicographer is called upon to define. Take such words as *flat*, *height*, *best*, *time*, *way*, *chair*, *walk*, *give*, *boot*, *dry*, *look*, and a thousand more. I have often thought that lexicographers must sweat blood when they sit down to define such words. It is, however, an amusing and profitable exercise to take a number of simple words and write down their meanings, and then compare your definitions with those in a good dictionary. How would you define the verb to *sit?*

♣ ♣ ♣

"WHAT IS THE WORD I WANT?"

A writer is frequently "stumped" for a word. He knows that it exists and that it would express his meaning. He has a haunting mental image of some quality for which several words occur to him, but none gives him the image back. Or he has written a word which is exact, but is not rhythmical or euphonious, and he wishes to exchange it for another. He may feel that the word he has written is too colloquial, or not colloquial enough. But the word he wants has slipped, like a coin, into some chink of his brain, and he cannot get it out. What is he to do? He should consult Roget's "Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases." This work,

which has never been superseded, or, I believe, even imitated, is a dictionary reversed. It gives words for meanings instead of meanings for words.

Peter Mark Roget, M.D., was born in 1779, five years before the death of Dr. Johnson, and lived till 1869. After retiring from the secretaryship of the Royal Society to live in Upper Bedford Place, Bloomsbury, he worked out his "Thesaurus" from a special catalogue of words which he had made for his own use as early as 1805. It was published in 1852, and reached its twenty-eighth edition in his lifetime. In 1879 it was enlarged by his son, Mr. John L. Roget, and it was brought further up to date in 1911 by his grandson, Mr. Samuel Romilly Roget. In this improved form it is published by Messrs. Longmans at the price of five shillings.

Let us suppose a few difficulties. You are writing something about light, or colour, or photography, and you must refer to that property of light which produces chemical changes. You write down —— rays. For the life of you, you cannot recall that word. You

know it to be the technical and only possible word, and you have lost it. —— rays ! You look at the chimney-pots. You draw on your blotting-pad. It won't come, and time is passing. To search an encyclopædia may not be possible, and would be tedious. But Roget ! You turn to the index, to the word *light*, and find a whole column filled with synonyms, analogues, metaphorical uses, transferred meanings, and what not, all relating to *light*. At a glance you see that the word you want will be associated with " luminosity," Section 420. You turn to Section 420, and find a long, well-arranged catalogue of words relating to light in its meaning of luminosity. Running your eye quickly through groups beginning with such unwanted words as day, glow, flash, spark, lustre, chiaroscuro, garish, and so forth—each the leader of a little company of like words—you suddenly come on your lost sheep, the now perfectly remembered word ACTINIC. Nothing more. You had the meaning, now the word itself is restored to you. Consider the value of such aid !

Again, you may in some connection write " savour," or " flavour," or " taste," or " smack " and be dissatisfied with them all, knowing (for

you have to know it) that there is a word better to your immediate purpose. You cannot think of it, but Roget gives it you—is it not TANG? There are a great many words which even a practised writer does not possess as he possesses ready money. For example, those which express shades of colour. He wants to describe something as red, but as a definite shade of red. A quiet red. Shall he be content with "ruddy"? Will "russet" describe it? "Rufous" is too uncommon. "Sorrel" has not the right suggestion. He thinks of the red colour of old flower-pots and is not helped. You can hardly write "flower-pot red." Then he turns to Roget, finds the entry "Red, 434," and in that section more than a hundred words conveying different degrees and qualities of redness. Dismissing most of them at sight, he presently finds the word he wanted, and which has just eluded him; it was RUST-RED.

Let us now imagine that a whole phrase is required. A writer wishes to denounce a certain policy, or a piece of harsh legislation, as contrary to eternal justice and therefore bound to fail. So he writes:—

"The history of persecution is a history of endeavours to cheat Nature, to make water run up-hill, to . . ."

He wants a third clause to give weight and balance to his sentence. Several may occur to him. He might add " to square the circle," but that hardly conveys the idea of *gross* impossibility. Or he might write " to extract sunbeams from cucumbers," but that illustrates an impossibility of *getting* something, and he is concerned with the futility of *doing* something. " To make bricks without straw " may not fit the occasion, any more than " to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," or " wash a blackamoor white," although these phrases convey the idea of impossibility. " To labour in vain " and " to kick against the pricks " are equally unsuitable. " To roll the stone of Sisyphus " brings in alien associations. He wants a simple material impossibility. And so he turns to Roget, and to the word " impossible," in search of a phrase of which he has already an idea so definite that it enables him to reject all these. And there, in its proper place, he finds " *to weave a rope of sand* " and recognises it as his property. But he is not bound by it, and he alters weave to twist, and then writes :—

" The history of persecution is a history of endeavours to cheat Nature, to make water run up-hill, to twist a rope of sand."

He had conceived the sentence, but Roget has

helped him to execute it. And Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote this sentence (in his essay on "Compensation"), would not have disdained such help.

It follows from its scheme that the "Thesaurus" gives most assistance to those who least need it, for it gives words only in exchange for ideas. But Roget is justified in his remark that as language is not only the medium but the instrument of thought, a catalogue of words related in many different ways to a single idea will often suggest trains of thought and expand the mental vision. The "Thesaurus" would be of the greatest assistance to teachers, but is it found in many schools? To a journalist, a novelist, or indeed any other writer, it is an invaluable desk-book.

"FARTHER" AND "FURTHER."

An author wrote:—

"In a book of mine which is now in the press, the publisher's proof-reader—obviously a very capable person—in several places deleted my word 'further' and substituted the word 'farther.' In a general way I prefer the word 'further,' but am open to correction."

To have met the writer's personal difficulty I ought to have known the contexts in which

he wrote "further," but these he did not supply. The two words are used indifferently by many writers, yet there is properly a distinction. Nesfield says that the word "farther," which is the comparative of "far," denotes a greater distance between two points as in the sentence, "Liverpool is *farther* from London than Dover is"; whereas "further" has the simpler and more general sense of more in advance, or additional, as in "The further end of the room," or in "A further reason exists." It will be found difficult, however, to support these distinctions by the usages of good writers.

♣ ♣ ♣

"THERE LET HIM LAY."

A discussion arose on Byron's famous solecism in "Childe Harold," in his address to the Ocean :—

> "And howling to his gods, where haply lies
> His petty hope in some near port or bay,
> And dashest him again to Earth: there let him
> *lay*."

From a communication by Mr. John Murray to *The Times Literary Supplement*, it appears that there is no doubt that Byron wrote "lay," using it wrongly as an intransitive verb. Mr. George Greenwood, the Shakespearean student,

points out, however, that Shelley, a much more careful writer, does so in his lines :—

> " The Apennine in the light of day
> Is a mighty mountain, dim and grey,
> Which between the earth and sky doth lay,"

and that Cowley had so used the verb before him.

♣ ♣ ♣

" YOU WAS " AND " WAS YOU ? "

A reader who, after a long interval, had been re-reading Fielding's " Tom Jones," wrote to me :—

> " Fielding makes all his characters—lord, lady, squire, lawyer, parson, and pedagogue—say ' You *was*.' None of them ever says, ' You *were*.'
>
> " From this it would appear that in Fielding's days educated people and polite society considered the form ' You *was* ' to be correct.
>
> " Having few facilities for research myself, I should be glad if you can give any information about this usage—*e.g.*, whether Fielding's contemporaries confirm it, how long it obtained, and when, how, and why our present ' You *were* ' took its place, etc."

This locution is in no way peculiar to Fielding. It will be found in many of the best eighteenth-century writers, if these are read in contemporary editions. In many modern editions " You was " may have been altered throughout to " You were." This is so in a modern edition of

Fielding that is before me. Thus, in Chapter IV. of Book XI., I read : " ' And you were more pleased still, my dear Harriet,' cries Sophia," whereas in an edition printed at the end of the eighteenth century I read : " ' And you *was* more pleased still.' " Cowper begins one of his letters, dated July 19th, 1765 : " I am exceedingly obliged to you for the letter with which you was so kind to favour me." So late a writer as Byron has this line (in " Don Juan ") : " You was not last year at the fair of Lugo." Such phrases were used by many of the purest writers of the eighteenth century, including Swift, Pope, Addison, William Law, and Horace Walpole.

The usage seems to be referable to custom rather than to grammar. When " thou " began to be disused in favour of " you," it was possible to consider " you " as singular where only one person was concerned, and the retention of " was " was therefore logical. " Was you ? " referred to one person, " Were you ? " to two or more. To-day, of course, " You was " would be branded as outrageous grammar, but it is not bad grammar at all if we choose to regard " you " as singular where only one person is being addressed ; and " Was you ? " has the

advantage of indicating the fact at once. "Was you?" became old-fashioned, but it was never really ungrammatical. "Was you?" indeed, is more direct and intimate than "Were you?"

♣ ♣ ♣

A MURDER AND A WORD.

I have touched elsewhere on Carlyle's coinage of the words "gig" and "gigmanity" (connoting a false respectability) from a dialogue that occurred in the trial of John Thurtell, the murderer. It is even more remarkable that the word *burke*, which is used in such perfectly seemly expressions as "to burke the question," "trying to burke the consequences," should be the adapted surname of another and more infamous murderer. The word seems to have been born at the foot of the scaffold on which William Burke was hanged in Edinburgh on January 28th, 1829. The story of his crimes is a grim one. When living in a lodging-house in Tanner's Close, Edinburgh, kept by William Hare, an aged man named Donald died in the same house. This was on November 29th, 1827. Instead of burying the old fellow decently, Burke and Hare sold his body to Dr. Robert Knox, a well-known anatomist who, in common with many respectable surgeons of the period,

patronised the "resurrectionists." Receiving £7 10s. for the body, Burke and Hare thought they saw a good business opening. But, instead of joining the body-snatching fraternity and working in cemeteries, they planned systematic murders with the same end in view. Their wives became their assistants and decoys, and the two scoundrels actually murdered some fifteen persons whom they invited into houses and suffocated. Their plan was to leave no trace of violence on the bodies they thus obtained. At last the neighbours became suspicious, and the police appeared on the scene shortly after an old woman named Margery Campbell had been done to death. Burke was put on his trial for murder, but it was necessary to allow Hare to turn King's evidence. Burke was duly hanged in the presence of an immense crowd, who shouted around the scaffold "Burke him! Burke him!" The word "stuck," and is now used with the secondary meaning—to put away quietly, to cover up, to shelve.

TROUBLE IN THE OFFICE.

A business woman reader wrote :—

"My employer, when dictating letters to me, very often uses the words 'the colour, polish and finish is

superb.' In typing these letters I invariably put '*are* superb,' but my employer always queries this. My argument is that substituting a pronoun for 'colour, polish and finish' I should have to write '*they* are superb,' therefore when mentioning the three words surely it is correct to use the verb 'are' and not 'is.' Meantime, as I use this phrase every day, I am putting 'is,' but I think it looks quite wrong."

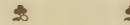
It is, indeed, quite wrong. To attach a singular verb to three nouns is, I think, in any event, stretching a well-known licence too far. It is true that when two nouns denote, in effect, one thing or quality, they may be followed by "is." Nesfield gives the examples: "Truth and honesty *is* the best policy," and "Curry and rice *was* his favourite food." Frequently the use of the singular verb after two nouns clamps and emphasises the meaning. But the nouns must be halves of a whole. I would pass "the polish and finish is superb." But colour is unrelated to either. You may have polish without colour, or finish without colour, or both without colour. The phrase quoted by my correspondent contains, to say the least of it, two unrelated and uncombined nouns, and therefore her view is right.

Another correspondent wrote :—

"We have frequently to prepare specifications for

contract work, and whilst I invariably use the phrase 'Particulars are as follows,' my colleague employs 'Particulars are as follow.' If I am wrong grammatically I plead universal usage, and that therefore the use of the latter expression is abominably pedantic."

I am in favour of using the singular verb, "follows," making "particulars" a collective noun. The use of the singular in all, or nearly all, such contexts makes for simplicity and dignity. Moreover, "follows" is not strictly governed by the plural "particulars." One would have to write, "Particulars follow," but "Particulars are as follows" is good English.



DO WE UNDERSTAND "RULE, BRITANNIA"?

I received the following complaint of the way in which our great naval song is interpreted:

"How is it that so many leading English vocalists and others do such cruel despite to 'Rule, Britannia'? They declare Britannia 'rules' the waves, a 'fact' which was very seriously disputed during the late war, when half of our merchant fleet was at the bottom of the sea. The poet, with the caution which is said to characterise his race—he was a Scotsman, of course—never said anything of the kind. Consider for a moment his own words. Notice the divine command, uttered by the mouths of guardian angels, to this sea-girt isle newly risen from the deep—'Britannia, *rule* the waves.' To be mistress of the seas was her glorious destiny, provided, we may suppose, that she proved worthy of her trust.

" Britons never ' shall ' be slaves is equally ridiculous. It implies that our freedom is secured and guaranteed to us for all time without our doing anything to deserve it. Never ' will ' be slaves are the words James Thomson wrote, and they connote a totally different idea, for the unconditional security conferred by the ' shall ' at once gives place to the prouder notion of a people always ready to defend itself."

Certainly *rule*, not *rules*, was written by Thomson, and it expresses a divine command. But I am not at all sure that he wrote " Britons never *will* be slaves." Even if he did, " never *shall* be slaves " is not ridiculous. On the contrary, it appears to be, like " Rule, Britannia, Britannia, rule the waves," a part of the angel's message, and to be a prophetic affirmation of that which shall be, not a resolve on the part of Britons themselves, and to be all the more majestic and emphatic on that account.

WAKE AND AWAKE.

" Which are the correct and which the incorrect, which the transitive and which the intransitive, of the following : wake, awake, wake up, waken, awaken, woke, awoke, woke up, woken, awoken, waked, awaked, waked up, wakened, awakened, wakened up ? "

Wake can be both transitive and intransitive, and will therefore be correct or incorrect, according to the context. In the sense of to rise from

sleep, it is intransitive and correct, as in "Whether I wake or sleep"; in the sense of to arouse some one or something from rest or sleep, it is transitive, as in "Did it not wake you?" I take both examples from Shakespeare, but one could find such anywhere. The same applies to "awake." It is transitive and correct in "And his disciples came, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us, we perish." It is intransitive and correct in "I shall awake, though this body be destroyed." The same applies, or can apply, to most of the other forms of "wake" and "awake." Many questions of this kind can be determined only by referring to the context, and then it becomes less a matter of grammar than of clear thinking.

♣ ♣ ♣

"LET THEM SAY."

I was asked for the origin of the famous motto which, I believe, is a favourite with Mrs. Asquith, "They have said—*What say they?—Let them say*." The question was answered in two interesting letters to the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. A correspondent pointed out that the source is really classical, and that on late Roman gems was often engraved, in Greek, a motto of which a free translation was seen

above the doors of various houses in Scotland built in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thus :—

"They haif said.
Quhat say they?
Lat thame say."

Another correspondent mentioned that this is "the family motto of the old Earls Marischal, of Dunottar Castle, in Kincardineshire, who founded Marischal College in Aberdeen, and appears—in gold letters—over the main entrance to the old college buildings to this day. The old family had to flee the country for their share in a Jacobite rising, took refuge in Prussia, and one of them rose to high rank in the army of Frederick the Great."

♣ ♣ ♣

"BETWEEN EACH."

Two correspondents simultaneously asked whether this expression is correct: "*Between each course.*" I cannot think it correct when it signifies position between only *two* objects or two points of time. You may write "between courses" or "between two of the courses," but not "between each course." On the other hand, when "between" appertains to more than two things, as in, "They quarrelled

between themselves" or "Between the Great Powers of Europe," it has the meaning of "among." The "New English Dictionary" has this note: "This word is sometimes said of more than two, when it is desired to mark the participation of all the parties more definitely than it can be done by *among*. It is still the only word available to express the relation of a thing to many surrounding things severally and individually, *among* expressing a relation to them collectively and vaguely. We should not say 'The space lying among three points'; or 'A treaty among three Powers'; or 'The choice lies among three candidates'; or, 'To insert a needle among the closed petals of a flower.'"

♣ ♣ ♣

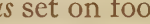
A MARE'S NEST.

The readers of an English technical journal discussed the question whether "*Let him*" is correct, or whether the phrase should not be "*Let he.*" "Let he depart"! And then the editor, taking a hand, perplexed both parties by quoting Kingsley's well-known album poem, in which he wrote, "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever." He asks, "What do our correspondents think of that?" If "him" why not "whom"? "Be good, sweet maid,

and let whom will be clever." A *Morning Post* writer justly remarked that so long as such a correction can be suggested, the hour for the Grammarian's Funeral has not yet struck. Kingsley's line is seen to be correct because it is obviously elliptical—the sense being " Let [him or her] who will, be clever."

THE PUZZLING SUBJUNCTIVE.

A reader quoted the sentence, " A conspiracy was set on foot to find out if this was true," and remarked that many writers would write : " if this *were* true." He asked for a guiding rule. In this instance I think that the indicative mood " was " is correct. There is nothing conditional, and the indicative " *was* set on foot " is properly followed by the indicative " was true." The question whether in the result the implied statement turned out true or false does not introduce the true subjunctive element of doubt, or *conditionality*, into the grammatical form of the sentence.



The point is illustrated in that admirable manual, " The King's English," by a quotation from Lord Rosebery : " Dr. Chalmers was a

believer in an Establishment as he conceived an Establishment should be. Whether such an Establishment were possible or not it is not for me now to discuss." Here *were* should be *was :* the sentence is not conditional. But the answer to another correspondent was different; he had quoted this sentence :—

"Now that the Government report has been issued, it looks as though broadcasting were finally established on a sound basis."

The sentence is correct as it stands. "*As if*" and "*as though*" are always followed by the subjunctive. They introduce the conditional. The sentence really means : "Now that the Government report has been issued it looks as though broadcasting were as finally established as it would be if it were in fact already established."

❧ ❧ ❧

TYRANNIES OF PUNCTUATION.

A feature of Cobbett's Grammar, to which I have referred elsewhere, is his refusal to be falsely exact or comprehensive. Here he will not satisfy many avid students of to-day, who, judging by my experience, imagine that grammar can provide for every difficulty, and that, properly known, it leaves nothing to taste or personal responsibility. A mistake ! A corre-

spondent asked me to give him certain precise rules in punctuation. I replied that I knew of none, and that if I did I should refuse to be bound by them. Yet modern grammars will give you fifty rules which must seemingly be obeyed, and which purport to cover the field. Cobbett knew that no two writers use the same punctuation, and that they never will; and having imparted all safe information he ends thus: "You will now see that it is quite impossible to give any *precise rules* for the use of these several points. Much must be left to taste: something must depend upon the weight which we may wish to give to particular words or phrases; and something on the seriousness or the levity of the subject on which we are writing."

In other words, punctuation is nearly as much a matter of an author's style as his choice of words.

CONCERNING LOVE-LETTERS.

All love-letters, as such, are equal—when they are sincere. A servant-girl's love-letter is as good as a duchess's, and Sam Weller's Valentine letter to Mary, of Ipswich, is as true a love-letter as ever was written. The love-

letters of the great are not necessarily great love-letters. In truth, the greatness of a love-letter can be judged only by the man or woman who receives it. I do not see how a love-letter can be judged by any literary or emotional standard, for one does not, and cannot, know the " rate of exchange " between the writer and the recipient. For this reason, if for no other, it is doubtful whether love-letters should be published at all. But the practice of publishing them is old.

In his " Love-Letters of Great Men and Women, from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day," a representative collection, Dr. C. H. Charles asks : " What are the essentials of the Ideal Love-Letter ? " and does not answer it, because he cannot. No one can. He takes refuge in the remark : " One must recognise that the love-letter in itself, of no matter what period, displays so much intrinsic and perennial truth, that the same sentiments and passions sway Antony and Cleopatra as they do Romeo and Juliet ; that there is as much eternal verity in the loves of Tom Bowling and Black-eyed Susan as in those of Abelard and Héloise, of Petrarca and Laura." He is right, no doubt, in suggesting that very few love-

letters of to-day have the substance and continuity of the old sort :—

" Our modern young people deal in chewing-gum phrases and expectorated word-parings, like United States screen captions : old bean—topping—top hole—priceless—I don't think—gadgets—the wind up—fed up—and then some. A clever continuation writer for the film could manufacture a five-reel love-story out of that."

Whether this is a fair account of the average love-letter of to-day I do not know, but in any event, the true love-letter must mean, to-day, as much as it ever did, if Love itself means as much.

All is as it is felt. The " I love you " letter may become a rant which, if it does not defeat its intimate purpose (as to which only one person can ever form a judgment), may be a shock to the detached reader. I, at least, am not moved—still less whirled away into empyreans of passion—by such a letter as Heinrich von Kleist, one of Goethe's satellite poets, addressed to a lady named Adolphine Henriette Vogel. I do not advise any young man to imitate Kleist, but I print his letter in italics as an act of piety :—

" My Jettchen, my little heart, my dear thing, my dovelet, my life, my life-light, my all, my goods and chattels, my castles, acres, lawns, and vineyards, O sun of my life, Sun, Moon and Stars, Heaven and Earth, my Past and Future,

my bride, my girl, my dear friend, my inmost being, my heart's blood, my entrails, star of my eyes, O dearest, what shall I call you?"

What indeed? But Herr Kleist has, until now, merely hinted his love. He continues :—

"My golden child, my pearl, my precious stone, my crown, my queen and empress. You dear darling of my heart, my highest and most precious, my all and everything, my wife, my wedding, the baptism of my children, my tragic play, my posthumous reputation. Ach! you are my second better self, my virtues, my merits, my hope, the forgiveness of my sins, my future and sanctity. O little daughter of Heaven, my child of God, my intercessor, my guardian angel, my Cherubim and Seraph, I love you!"

The final statement might perhaps have been foreseen. Adolphine Henriette Vogel may have liked this kind of love-letter, but possibly Madame Mantalini was as well satisfied with Mr. Mantalini's briefer salutation, "My demnition little flower-pot!"

♣ ♣ ♣

"EMPLOYÉ" OR "EMPLOYEE"?

A reader congratulated me on "knowing how to spell *employé*." What he meant was, that we ought to prefer *employé* to employee, and he added :—

"This is a bit of rare knowledge nowadays. Most firms and heads of offices and factories write of the men

they employ as *employees*, and when asked why they brand these men as women, reply airily : ' Oh, that's how one writes it to-day.' "

I could not accept the compliment. Both "*employé*," which is French, and "employee," which is English, are correct. "Employee" is *not* the feminine of "*employé*." It is an English word constructed on the analogy of "referee," "legatee," "assignee," etc. It is true that the affix *ee* is derived from the French *é* (masculine) or *ée* (feminine), but it has long been emancipated from French. The *ee* in the English words I have quoted has no bearing on sex. Nor has it in "employee."

❧ ❧ ❧

WHAT IS AN IDEA?

The late Sir Edward Cook recalled Dr. Johnson's indignation at the misuse of the word "idea." Boswell reports him :—

"He was particularly indignant against the almost universal use of the word *idea* in the sense of notion or opinion, when it is clear that *idea* can only signify something of which an image can be formed in the mind."

This is sound, because "idea" is practically the Greek verb "to see"; an idea, therefore, is an image on the inner eye :—

"We may have an *idea* or *image* of a mountain, a tree, a building; but we cannot surely have an idea or image

of an argument or a proposition. Yet we have the sages of the law delivering their 'ideas' upon the question under consideration; and the first speakers in Parliament 'entirely coinciding in the *idea* which has been ably stated by an honourable member.'"

Johnson's protest came too late, and Archbishop Trench's later declaration that the word "idea" has been treated worse than any other in the language was equally in vain. Why, then, it will be said, not frankly abandon the old meaning, and accept the new? One does this, of course, in current speech and writing; but it is still necessary to preserve the old meaning when reading old masters. Thus in "Richard III." Shakespeare makes Buckingham say to Gloucester:—

> "Withal I did infer your lineaments,
> Being the right idea of your father,
> Both in your form and nobleness of mind."

Here the notion of seeing is preserved, as also it is by Milton in the single instance of his using the word at all, where, in Book VII. of "Paradise Lost," he describes the Creator's thought on the completion of His work:—

> "Thence to behold this new-created world,
> Th' addition of his empire, how it shew'd
> In prospect from this throne, how good, how fair,
> Answ'ring his great *idea*."

Now here, if the word "idea" is invested with

its present meaning, a fine passage becomes trivial and even ridiculous.

♣ ♣ ♣

AITCH OR HAITCH?

All the way from Singapore came a letter of inquiry concerning the pronunciation of the name of the letter "H." It appeared that it was the instruction of a former Director of Education in that colony to call the letter "*H*aitch," and my correspondent, marvelling at this, added: "My recollections tell me that flaying alive would have been the mildest punishment for such a pronunciation in my schooldays." That may be, but I cannot help thinking that there is something to be said for this pronunciation which the Director probably decreed as making the letter itself a mnemonic of the aspirate, and as possibly tending to check that inexplicable disuse of the aspirate where it is wanted and its use where it is not wanted.

♣

This displacement is one of the mysteries of speech, but I believe that the trouble has diminished in recent years. Even the Romans used to misplace their aspirates, as Catullus showed in one of his epigrams. In *Punch* a good many

years ago there appeared under a drawing of a London cabman in argument with his fare, the "legend," "Well, sir, if a *haitch* and a *ho*, and a *har* and a *hess*, and a *he* don't spell 'orse, then my name ain't 'Enery 'Olmes." The subject recalls Henry Mayhew's parody of Catherine Maria Fanshawe's famous enigma on "H," of which the following are a few lines :—

"I dwells in the Herth, and I breathes in the Hair,
If you searches the Hocean, you'll find that I'm there.
The fust of all Hangels in Holympus am Hi,
Yet I'm banished from 'Eaven, expelled from on 'Igh.
Not an 'Oss nor an 'Unter e'er bears me, alas!
But often I'm found on the top of a Hass.
I'm never in 'Ealth—have with Physic no power;
I dies in a Month, but comes back in a *H*our."

The name *aitch* is from the French *ache*, but the Latin name, unless I am an ignoramus in the matter, was *ha*. On the whole, then, there is something to be said for the Singapore Director. I think he was aiming at a kind of lingual inoculation.

♣ ♣ ♣

CAN YOU NAME THINGS?

The great name-choosers have never been literary people. They are too far from the object. It was the peasant, not the poet, who gave to English wild flowers such names as Forget-me-not, Love-lies-Bleeding, Thrift, Heart's-ease,

Shepherd's-purse, None-so-pretty, Goldilocks, London Pride, Lords and Ladies, Monkshood, and Love-in-a-Mist. What literary man, what entire Academy of Letters, could have hit on these names? The peasant hit on them, and long afterwards the man of letters came along and told this astonished yokel that he had been talking poetry all his life. The "unlettered Muse" excels all others in choosing names because it slowly finds the name *in* the thing instead of suddenly bringing the name *to* the thing. She did not name the flowers in the field with conscious art, or in a hurry, or to test its literary ability, but slowly accumulated enough common wit to invest the object with its common character, or—its friendliest suggestion. For undoubtedly the rustic mind often worked subjectively in this business. It often invented names for flowers, horses, dogs, and even cows, in terms of its own experience. Names like Love-in-Idleness, Poor Man's Pepper, Speedwell, Honesty, Kiss-me-at-the-Garden-Gate, and Traveller's Joy can be imitated by the literary man; he would not have invented one of them.

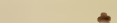
Any one can name a dog, but it is another thing to give a dog a name which other dogs will

applaud. This, one fancies, was done by sportsmen and shepherds and farmers when man and dog worked together for their living. Then it was that Tingler, and Dustie-foot, and Killbuck, and Boy, and Crab, and Mumper, and Ringwood, and Spot, and Belman, and the Jowlers and Rovers and Towsers first answered to their names. These were almost dogs' names for dogs. They did not test any kind of literary power, except our own power to see their finality. The name never seemed to be devised or bestowed. It was not so much a name given to a dog as the dog's name.

"There was a farmer *had a dog,*
And Bingo *was his name*—O!
B—i—n—g—o!
B—i—n—g—o!
B—i—n—g—o!
And Bingo was his name—O!"

A literary man can do something with a "purple cow," but only a dairymaid with a plentiful lack of literary ability could have initiated such simple names as Lightfoot, Whitefoot, Grizzle, Sweetlips, Early, Standfast, Fillpan, and Darling. Even Jezebel was bestowed with a dairymaid's knowledge, picked up half in the byre and half in the pew. If a literary man were asked to name a cow, he would follow the

dairymaid's nomenclature, not because she had literature, but because she was close to cow life. What is literature in him was in her an impulse from the nature of things, and the ability to name a cow well is, I imagine, less a test of literary power than of the power to milk. Some time ago Mr. Chesterton astonished the town by citing as a feat in "pure literature" the remark of a country girl who, after beholding the sea for the first time, was asked in her village what the waves had looked like. She replied, "Like cauliflowers." This was not literature in her, nor has it yet been adopted as literature. But it gave us a singular glimpse into the workings of the folk mind, if I may use such a term—that mind which names things in the dark to become beautiful afterwards in the light.



"ALL RIGHT" AND "ALRIGHT."

From a full heart, and from Brixton, a woman reader wrote :—

"Will you please pour oil on troubled waters? A difference of opinion has occurred in my house concerning the use of the word (or words) *all right*. My husband affirms that two words are necessary, my aunt insists that one word and one 'l' is correct. She brings elementary school-teachers to bear witness; my husband ridicules the authority of elementary school-teachers and refers her to dictionaries. She returns to the fray with

the evidence of a learned Director of Education to support her. My husband says 'Bah!' to the learned Director and refers to the high-class daily journals. The happiness and unity of my home is in danger. In despair I am appealing to you, the disputants agreeing so far that your dictum will be accepted. So please, is it 'Alright' or 'All right'?"

This case, I felt, ought to have been dealt with by a court missionary, but I doubted his ability to make any impression on the gentleman who said "Bah!" My summary judgment, which I am afraid did not pass for "oil," was that the gentleman who said "Bah!" was right, and that "alright" is all wrong. I regard "alright" as the most fusty, invalidish, picture-postcard misconcoction that has aspired to a place in the language. It unites two words, only to weaken both, and it impoverishes the idea to be conveyed. "All right" is really a contraction of "All's right," but wise contraction will go no farther. Each word increases the other's value.

♣

It is the curious fact that "all right" is very modern English, and that the earliest example of its use quoted in the "New English Dictionary" is from the "Pickwick Papers" (1837): "'Beg your pardon, sir,' continued Sam, touching his hat as Mr. Winkle descended, 'hope there

warn't a priory 'tachment, sir.' . . . 'It's all right, Sam; quite all right.'" The origin of the phrase was undoubtedly its common use by the guards of mail-coaches. Charles Lamb has a note on it in his "Table Talk," published in the *Athenæum* in 1824. He refers to the cheerful recurrence of the cry of the London omnibus conductors—"All's Right."

⁂ ⁂ ⁂

DOES THE EXCEPTION PROVE THE RULE?

I was asked whether the saying, "The exception proves the rule," is justifiable; or is it "illogical and nonsensical? . . . How can the exception to a rule prove the truth of that rule?"

This saying has often been discussed, yet the answer is simple. Used in the modern popular way it is a conversational device which will hardly bear examination. The exception cannot "prove" (*i.e.*, demonstrate) the soundness of the rule, for it is obvious that it goes some distance to prove the contrary. Nor can it be said to prove the existence of the rule, seeing that unless the rule is already known to exist, no exception to it can be known.

⁂

We have here an instance of a word whose old and true meaning has been strengthened in

some directions and left untouched in others, the result being confusion. When we say "the exception proves the rule" we ought to mean, "the exception makes trial of the rule," or "tests" the rule. This is what the Romans meant in their version, "*Exceptio probat regulam.*" The verb *probare* means to make trial of, to experiment with, to test. A printer's "proof" is not a demonstration of a page's correctness (I wish to heaven it were !), but a trial of it. When the Psalmist says, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me," he uses the word in this sense ; so does St. Paul when he counsels the Thessalonians to "prove all things and hold fast to that which is good." The value of an apparent exception to a known rule is that it refers us back to that rule and leads us to examine it afresh.

Dr. P. Fowler, in his "Elements of Inductive Logic," points out that there are, strictly speaking, no exceptions to a law of Nature. When we think we have found one it is seen, on examination, to be subject in part to another and conflicting law. For example, Dr. Johnson thought that the evidence for the migration of woodcocks was as good as could be desired. Some one said that there had been instances of them being found in summer in Essex, to which Johnson

replied, " Sir, that strengthens our argument. *Exceptio probat regulam.* Some being found shows that, if all remained, many would be found." It did not " prove " the rule, but it strengthened it, because the abundance of woodcock in winter can be contrasted with their fewness in summer. And Goldsmith added, " There is a partial migration of the swallows ; the stronger ones migrate, the others do not," thus introducing another rule which conflicts with the original one. In short, the exception may be said to illustrate the rule, but it cannot demonstrate it.

♣ ♣ ♣

A DESPERATE CASE.

A distracted reader wrote :

" I have had several sleepless nights. Can you give slumber ? One newspaper reported :—

" ' When the disaster occurred the pilot was in charge of the ship.'

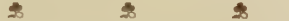
" Another reported :—

" ' At the time of the collision the ship was in charge of the pilot.'

" Can one wonder at the disaster under this dual but divided command ? Where is English—its meaning, its clarity ? "

The meaning and clarity of English are not compromised by the fact that two newspapers

have reported the same thing in equally correct English sentences which happen to be capable of being read in opposite senses by a combination of ingenuity and a genius for insomnia. In brief, there is nothing in it.



THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE.

There are people who demur to the study of the Bible as literature on the ground that the Word of God should be spared this kind of examination. Although it is difficult to take the contention seriously, it is necessary to answer it. The best reason for studying the Bible as literature is that it *is* literature. It has, indeed, been asked whether the Authorised Version of 1604–11 could have been done without the aid of men of letters, and even one or more poets. How could the cadences of the Psalms, the sublime questions and answers of the Book of Job, the rhapsodies of Isaiah, and the eloquence of Paul at Athens have been rendered by forty-seven scholars, of whom not one has left his mark on our literature? The suggestion has been made that Shakespeare, who, in 1604, was at the height of his genius, may have been called in to give poetry and majesty to

our Bible. Such surmises are not needed. The English language was then at its highest pitch and purity. Shakespeare had written most of his plays; two years earlier he had written "Hamlet." The Elizabethan lyrical poets had taught Englishmen the music of their tongue. Spenser's verse was the river of that music. Dramatists like Massinger, Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, Marston, and Webster had brought up their cohorts of words and splendid phrasings. Literature was in the air. Never had there been a time so favourable to great results; nor has there been one since.

*

Yet the literary form which the Authorised Version now wears is unsatisfactory. Professor Moulton declares roundly in his invaluable work, "The Literary Study of the Bible," that the Bible is the worst-arranged book in the world. The eye is not allowed to help the mind in recognising its literary structure. It is as though we printed the poems of Shelley and Wordsworth as prose. Thus even the full beauty of the last words of the Sermon on the Mount is veiled by the form given to them. Yet these words are a perfect example of that Hebrew poetry into which the prose of the Bible suddenly breaks

when the feeling is exalted or the imagination touched :—

"Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine,
and doeth them,
shall be likened unto a Wise Man,
which built his house upon the Rock:
And the rain descended,
and the floods came,
and the winds blew,
and beat upon that house;
and it fell not;
for it was founded upon the Rock.

And every one that heareth these words of mine,
and doeth them not,
shall be likened unto a Foolish Man,
which built his house upon the Sand:
And the rain descended,
and the floods came,
and the winds blew,
and smote upon that house;
and it fell:
and great was the fall thereof!"

These stanzas are from the Revised Version of 1881, in which several expressions are changed for the better. Here we have a beautiful poem in the free verse of the Hebrews. Note its perfect parallelism.

Parallelism of thought and expression—a sort of magnified alliteration—is the distinctive mark

of all Hebrew poetry, of its proverbial literature, and of much of its narrative. Professor Moulton well described its movement. "Like the swing of a pendulum to and fro, like the tramp of an army marching in step, the versification of the Bible moves with a rhythm of parallel lines." The entire Book of Job, excepting only the first two chapters and part of the last, is poetry, and ought never to have been printed in any other form. Only then can we appreciate the full majesty of such a passage as this :—

"Hast thou given the horse strength ?
Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder ?
Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper ?
The glory of his nostrils is terrible.

. . . . .

He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage
Neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.
He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha :
And he smelleth the battle afar off,
The thunder of the captains, and the shouting."

This parallelism obtains through all the moods of Hebrew poetry, though with variations which cannot here be displayed. And it is found to be almost miraculously appropriate to literary forms which are far apart. It gives pungency to mere worldly wisdom, as in Proverbs :—

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard ;
Consider her ways, and be wise :
Which having no guide,

Overseer, or ruler,
Provideth her meat in the summer,
And gathereth her food in the harvest.
How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard ?
And when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep ?
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep :
So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth,
And thy want as an armed man."

In passing, note that wonderfully true simile, " as one that travelleth "—one that has far to come, maybe, but yet comes nearer and nearer and arrives, at last, like footsore doom.

The Hebrew mind was simple and the Hebrew eye was fixed on the common objects of life. The sun, the moon, and the stars, the wind and the rain, the darkness and depth of the sea, the cedars of Lebanon, the bulls of Bashan, the well or the pool, the winepress, the mill, the corn yellow to harvest, the green pastures and still waters, the rose of Sharon, the great rock in a weary land, the potter's wheel, the husbandman's toil, the sparrow and the eagle, the wild goats and calving hinds, the hen gathering her chickens, silver and gold, spear and shield, flesh and bone—such are the objects of life, common to all ages, to which these old poets went for their imagery. In that immortal rhapsody on love at first sight,

Solomon's Song, how marvellously are the swoonings and raptures of love expressed through the medium of everyday things :—

" Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun,
And terrible as an army with banners ?
I went down into the garden of nuts
To see the fruits of the valley,
And to see whether the vine flourished,
And the pomegranates budded.
Or ever I was aware, my soul made me
Like the chariots of Ammi-nadib."

Beyond this realism Hebrew poetry never stretches. The abstract is unknown to it. Yet Milton declared : " There are no songs comparable to the songs of Zion, no orations equal to those of the prophets."

♣ ♣ ♣

" LABOUR."

A great word which has lost much breadth of meaning is *labour*. The loss is far from absolute, but it is sufficiently great to be mischievous. " Labour " is more and more thought to mean manual work, whereas it ought to suffer no such restriction. Webster rightly defines it as " Physical or mental toil, bodily or intellectual exertion . . . human effort, bodily or mental, made

wholly or partly for some end other than the pleasure directly arising from its performance." The subtle suggestiveness of words, and the *lead* they give to thought, implant a real element of falsity in such expressions as "The claims of labour" or "The Labour Party," and Sir Edward Cook rightly points out that this masked use of the word has encouraged fallacies and prejudices. I rather wonder that he did not point out that the word recovers all its true meaning when, at the open grave of a great thinker, or soldier, or statesman, we raise the hymn: "Now the *labourer's* task is o'er."

WHAT IS A "SERVANT"?

Very little seems to have been learned from the Labour Ministry's inquiry into domestic service, but at least some people must have been led to ponder on the extraordinary fact that the words "servant" and "service," which have so many noble connotations, become a stumbling-block in the domestic sphere. The religious significance of the word is, of course, the highest of all. Moses is repeatedly called the servant of God. Paul writes in the character of "a servant of God" to Titus, and no higher name can be given to, or claimed by, any priest. The words

servant and service have the highest dignity in the hierarchy of the State. The Prince of Wales's motto, "Ich dien," means "I serve," and has come down to him from the Black Prince. The Army and Navy glory in the word "Service." Shakespeare uses the word nobly in a famous passage in "As You Like It":—

> "O good old man, how well in thee appears
> The constant service of the antique world,
> When service sweat for duty, not for meed!"

The word "service" is applied to public worship and to the rites of marriage and burial. And yet this wonderful word has become a scorn and an offence to vast numbers of young women in whose ears the very sound of it suggests social degradation; and this feeling has become so universal that it would almost appear that the first and most essential thing to be done is to banish it for ever from domestic use. Some one suggested the other day that domestic servants should in future be called housekeepers, and there is much to be said for the change. In homes where several servants are kept they might perhaps rank as first, second, or third housekeeper. Every word connected with what we call domestic service seems to have become an obstacle to improvement. "Uniform," so

honourable in other spheres, is without honour in the kitchen—except, of course, in self-respecting and, therefore, respected kitchens.

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"LIKE" AND "AS."

A correspondent wrote :—

"Sir Henry Hadow recently stated that 'the use of *like*, instead of *as*, a terrible vulgarism, was coming into popular use.' Will you kindly explain exactly what is meant? Is the word used wrongly in the two following sentences, for instance: (1) 'I intend to do my hair *like* yours.'—(2) 'I intend to do my hair *like* you do yours?'"

The first sentence is correct, or will pass. The second is grossly incorrect: it should be "I intend to do my hair as you do yours." "As" appertains to verbs, "like" to nouns. One thing is "like" another; you do a thing "as" some one else does it.

♣ ♣ ♣

MOTHER SHIPTON'S PROPHECY.

Interest in what is quite erroneously called "Mother Shipton's Prophecy" is not dead, though the "prophecy" itself has been dead as mutton since the year 1881. A correspondent

asked me to quote its words. They were commonly circulated in this form :—

"ANCIENT PREDICTION

(Entitled by popular tradition Mother Shipton's Prophecy).

Published in 1448, republished in 1641.

"Carriages without horses shall go,
And accidents fill the world with woe.
Around the earth thoughts shall fly
In the twinkling of an eye.
The world upside down shall be,
And gold be found at the root of a tree.
Through hills men shall ride,
And no horse be at his side.
Under water men shall walk,
Shall ride, shall sleep, shall talk.
In the air men shall be seen
In white, in black, in green ;
Iron in the water shall float,
As easily as a wooden boat.
Gold shall be found and shown
In a land that's not now known.
Fire and water shall wonders do,
England shall at last admit a foe.
The world to an end shall come
In eighteen hundred and eighty-one."

These lines spread a kind of terror among uneducated people, and among children. The last couplet gave me shudders in the 'seventies. Many will remember their effect. Yet the

rhymes are no older than 1862, when they were written by Charles Hindley, a well-known London bookseller and publisher. The "Prophecy" had long engaged the correspondents of *Notes and Queries*, more than one of whom had called for proof that it had any antiquity. At last, in the issue of April 26th, 1873, while, to my own recollection, they were still held in awe, the following announcement appeared. It would have comforted me greatly had I known of it.

"MOTHER SHIPTON'S PROPHECIES.—Mr. Charles Hindley, of Brighton, in a letter to us, has made a clean breast of having fabricated the 'Prophecy' quoted at page 450 of our last volume [the lines quoted above], with some ten others included in his reprint of a chap-book version, published in 1862."

This is accepted as the whole truth of the matter in the article on Mother Shipton in the "Dictionary of National Biography," in which it is stated that this interesting lady "is, in all likelihood, a wholly mythical personage."

♣ ♣ ♣

A WORD TO AVOID.

A word which careful editors are constantly striking out of accepted manuscripts is "evince." It is used unbecomingly in all such phrases as "he evinced a great desire" or "his passion for study was evinced by his fine library." To

evince means, in its primary but now obsolete sense, to subdue or conquer, and is so used by Milton: "Error by his own arms is best evinced." Its proper meaning, now, is to prove, to make manifest, to show in a clear manner. It is too strong a word for either of the above phrases. A man may "have," "show," or "reveal" a desire; his passion for study may be "indicated" or "betokened" by his library. Good writers have little use for the verb "evince."

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THE LIMITS OF FICTION.

How far may a novelist introduce the impossible into his stories? A reader pointed out that Longfellow's poetic story of "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*" contains a flaw: the narration of events which could not be known. In the height of the storm, when he feared the worst, the captain bound his little daughter to the mast. We are told what followed:—

"'O father! I hear the church bells ring,
O say, what it may be!'
'Tis a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!'—
And he steered for the open sea.

. . . .

'O father! I see a gleaming light,
O say, what may it be?'
But the father answered never a word
A frozen corpse was he."

Then a great billow swept the crew " like icicles from the deck." Next morning a fisherman saw a drifting mass with a drowned girl lashed to it. Who, then, could tell the story of the captain's acts and his daughter's questions ?

Everything, it must be, depends on the way in which a story is told. Is it told as fact or as fantasy ? If as fact, then it cannot be right to introduce a patent and *logical* absurdity. Some stories wear all the aspects of fact ; detective stories, for example. What would be Sir Conan Doyle's treatment at the hands of his readers if, after working up a first-class mystery and appetising them for its solution, he had ended the story on a *logical* absurdity ? Metaphorically, his readers would make his life not worth living. They would assert imposture or stupidity. But wherever, and by whatever means, fantasy is postulated, the objection does not hold. Even where it is absent, licence is given to novelists. They may play their own game with probabilities, and make extravagant use of coincidence. But they do so at their risk, and are wise not to presume too far on their readers' sense of reality.

The reason is that it is the office of fiction to produce an illusion of truth, or, alternatively,

to secure the reader's willing surrender to what is fantasy. " Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde " is an impossible story. So is " Vice Versâ." But in each it is the impossibility of the story that alone makes the story itself possible, and the reader willingly submits his reason to the assumption in order that, within the fantasy, he may recover both reason and entertainment. This surrender on the part of the reader can be obtained in a hundred ways. The mere words, " Once upon a time," are usually sufficient. Bunyan, in the first sentence of " The Pilgrim's Progress," is careful to put himself on terms with his readers :

" As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep ; and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw. . . ."

The whole story is thus accepted as a dream. It is a common device to tell an amazing story and conclude with the saving revelation that it was all a dream. Another device, as in " Vice Versâ," is to introduce a magic stone or other agency such as the reader can accept provisionally. In dramatic poetry no precaution is necessary. Milton does not need to explain how he was able to report the conversations of Adam and Eve.

Nevertheless, many novelists abuse the privi-

lege of exaggeration. They introduce incidents which shock the reader's sense of truth to life. In these instances it frequently happens that the author springs upon his critics, newspaper or other, evidence that what they supposed to be a wild impossibility, untrue to life, had actually happened; and he does this with an air of triumph and finality. Such an answer is no answer. For it is the business of fiction to produce the illusion of truth, and that illusion may be shattered not only by a logical absurdity but by the use of material that is so uncommon and so widely unknown as to produce the same effect. If a thing has happened, to all appearance, only once in the world's history, it may be as unsuitable for a novelist's purposes as if it had never been contemplated by the human mind.

WHEN WE THINK IN GREEK.

We have all more Greek than we know. Thousands of our most subtle and beautiful words are Greek and have come to us from that world of myth which shimmers for ever behind "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome." You read a leading article which discusses the reform of some system, and it demands *the cleansing of the Augean stable.*

The phrase may have become so familiar in like connections that you vaguely understand that it refers to a summary turn-out of bad methods or corrupt officials; but its full significance is lost if one does not know that what is now a common phrase is an allusion to the fifth labour of Hercules, who, at the instigation of Juno, was compelled to undertake twelve colossal tasks, of which the fifth was to clean out the stables, or byres, of Augeas, King of Elis, where three thousand oxen had been untended for thirty years.

So deeply have these names and stories of the dawn of culture infused themselves in our speech that even the least educated refer to them unknowingly. When the two weary Bath chairmen brought Mrs. Dowler from a party at three o'clock in the morning, they were unable to make anyone in Mr. Dowler's and Mr. Pickwick's lodgings hear their prolonged knockings. "'Servants in the arms o' Porpus, I think,' said the short chairman, warming his hands at the attendant link-boy's torch." This is true to life, but the illiterate chairman did not know that he was expressing his impatience by a perverted allusion to Morpheus, the bringer of dreams, the son and servant of Somnus, the deity who presided over sleep.

In recent years the name of no Greek deity has been more on the lips than Pan. The beautiful statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens is a tribute not only to Sir James Barrie's exquisite creation, but to that god of the woods and fields who inspired it. Pan, the son of Mercury and a wood nymph, has a great place in modern poetry. His name signifies "all," hence a temple dedicated to all the gods was called a Pantheon, and a church in which honour is rendered to the famous dead has acquired the same name. Pan himself was a wild and wandering creature of the woods and mountains. He was goat-footed and horned, flat-nosed and tailed, yet he played wild sweet music on his pipes (hence "panpipes"), and, while he figures as a satyr pursuing the nymphs and dryads, he is also regarded as the spirit of living with Nature. But Pan was the dread of all who wandered through a trackless forest or near a gloomy cave. Sudden and unreasonable fear would seize them at the thought of Pan's near presence. Hence our word "panic." It is a singular thought that a panic on the Stock Exchange recalls the eerie terrors felt by Arcadian peasants in ages remoter than any of which history tells. No better example could be found of the transfusion of an ancient story into four lines

thousands of years after that story was a wisp of fable in the morning of time.

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The night sky and the sun-kissed soil are alike strewn with names which are Greek myths crystallised. Such stories as those of Perseus and Andromeda, Orion the hunter, Bacchus and Ariadne, the Pleiades (daughters of Atlas), Diana and Endymion, and a hundred others, are, so to speak, indexed in the heavens. The narcissus recalls the myth of Narcissus and the jealousy of Diana, whom Narcissus repelled. Refusing to love either the goddess or any earthly maiden, he fell in love with his own image in a pool. Unable to embrace it, he pined and died of grief. The repentant nymphs would have given him burial, but when they looked for his young body they found only the flower which bears his name. The story has been touched on by many poets —by Milton in " Comus," by Chaucer, Spenser, and Goldsmith.

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It is clear, then, that the old Greek myths are no esoteric study. So far from being " high-brow " (detestable word !), they are elemental to our language and literature. Men of distinguished birth or origin are prone to assert themselves, and it should not be forgotten that a word

or a phrase is equally enhanced by length of history and storage of suggestion. One might refer to hundreds in which a Greek myth is enclosed: such as "*Scylla and Charybdis*," "*rich as Crœsus*," "*Cerberus*," "*vulcanite*," "*Amazons*," "*heel of Achilles*," "*Daily Argus*," "*lethal chamber*," "*sibyl*," "*nemesis*," "*Europe*," "*Titanic*," "*mentor*," "*stentorphone*," "*Nestor*," "*Pandora's box*," "*Champs Elysées*," "*Æolian Hall*," "*gordian knot*," and many more.

♣

Some of these myths are crude, even repellent, but seen through the mists of ages they belong to the childhood of man and the whole of human memory. Ruskin says, "To the mean person the myth means little; to the noble person much." The poet, the artist, and the dreamer will return to these stories so long as men feel the burden and the mystery of life, and are fain to lose them in "the light that never was on sea or land."

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"WIND" OR "WINDE"?

The question whether "wind" should, in poetry, be pronounced with a short *i*, to rhyme with "wind," as in "window," or with "kind,"

has often reached me. " The leader of our male voice choir insists "—wrote a correspondent—" on its being pronounced in song as it is in ' window,' whereas I have always been taught to give it the longer vowel sound as in ' rind.' " My own view is that " wind " should always, in poetry, be pronounced with the short *i* as in " window " except when, by an old and recognised poetic licence, it must be pronounced as *winde*, as in " kind," in order to rhyme. There are very few available rhymes to " wind " with the short *i*. Hence this licence. Even so, the conversion of wind (as in " window ") into wind (as in " kind ") weakens the word.

When Shelley writes, in one of his great odes :—

> " The trumpet of a prophecy ! O wind,
> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ? "

it is obvious that the long *i* is demanded for the sake of rhyme. But when he writes :—

" O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,"

I think that " wind " should take the short *i* for the sake of effect. When Wordsworth, in one of the great sonnets, writes :—

" The winds that will be howling at all hours,"

it would surely be an outrage to pronounce

" winds " as in " kinds." But when, as in another poem, he rhymes " wind " to " confined," you obey. When Milton writes :—

> " The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
> But, swoln with wind . . ."

it would be ridiculous to give " wind " the long *i*, but when in his versification of the 83rd Psalm he rhymes " wind " with " find," an opposite conclusion is obvious. On the other hand, where " wind " occurs at the end of a line in blank verse it may be, and probably often is, better to give it the long *i*. Milton's " Lycidas " is in rhyme, but he leaves the line " Unwept, and welter to the parching wind " unrhymed. Here, instinctively, I should pronounce " wind " like " kind."

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THE VEXED POSSESSIVE.

One of the most needless yet recurrent of doubts among literary beginners and letter-writers concerns the use of *'s* after words or names ending in *s*. Acting on a misconception of the rule, many people give us those possessive abominations, " Wells' novels " (for Wells's), " Keats' poems " (for Keats's), " Hicks' Hall " (for Hicks's), " Prince of Wales' " (for Prince of Wales's), and the like. The rules jointly laid

down by authorities so high as Mr. Horace Hart and Sir James A. H. Murray and Mr. Henry Bradley in their "Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press, Oxford," should end the matter. (It is unnecessary to point out how carefully these great lexicographers and grammarians would legislate for such a press.) Their first rule is, "Use *'s* for the possessive case in English names and surnames wherever possible." Write, they say, "Augustus's," "Hicks's," "St. James's Square," "Jones's," "Thomas's," and so on. They add that, even in longer names the same possessive form is to be preferred—thus "Theophilus's" is better than "Theophilus'," though here they allow the second form to be "admissible." They pronounce in favour of "Mars's," "Zeus's," "Venus's," and so forth.

There are exceptions: "Ancient names in *es* are usually written *es'* in the possessive, *e.g.*, 'Ceres' rites,' 'Xerxes' fleet'"; and "this form should certainly be used in words longer than two syllables, *e.g.*, 'Arbaces',' 'Miltiades',' 'Themistocles'.'" But this "applies only to *ancient* words." Finally: "French names ending in *s* or *x* should always be followed by *'s*

when used possessively in English"—thus: Rabelais's (pronounced Rabelay's), Hanotaux's (pronounced Hanoto's). Poets may legitimately vary the form *s's* to *s'*—when they are writing poetry. The real authority for these rules is not their distinguished authorship, but their ascertained correspondence with fitness and convenience in actual speech and writing.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

That words are things, that they are more potent than we realise, that they secrete their original meanings and, like radium, revenge themselves when mishandled, is the very truth. Some of the greatest words have suffered, and are reacting in this way. What is the meaning of the word *religion?* In modern controversies of the graver sort one is often baffled by the popular confusion between religion and Christianity, between religion and particular divisions of faith, between religion and doctrine, and between religion and the churches. In its true and widest sense "religion" means simply reverence for everything sacred, and any manifestation of this feeling. What a man sees for himself to be sacred is that man's religion, and in so far as he

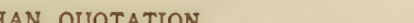
loves and ensues it he is religious. Doctrines may go, churches may faint and fail, but it does not follow that there will be less religion in the world.

The broader use of the word survives in some of our daily expressions, and, of course, oddly in those which have least connection with divinity. If we say that a man carries out his instructions with "religious care," or even that he takes a Turkish bath "religiously" once a week, we are speaking more accurately, nearer to the core of the word, than if we describe him as religious when we mean that he is pious or orthodox or diligent in public worship. In its root meaning the word signifies a care or heeding, a persisting zeal. Shakespeare again and again uses it thus. He makes Sir Toby Belch say of Viola, who has made her exit (in man's attire): "A very dishonest paltry boy, and more a coward than a hare . . ." Fabian replying: "A coward, a most devout coward, and religious in it." So, also, Henry V. says:—

> "My learned lord, we pray you to proceed
> And justly and religiously unfold
> Why the law Salique," etc.

When we recognise that a man's religion is the

sum of the highest things he cares for, we shall disperse much fog.



THE ORPHAN QUOTATION.

"I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to my fellow-creatures, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

I have been asked by more correspondents than I can number to give the origin of this sentence, which conveys as fine a message as any Scripture. Strange to say, the author is unknown. Yet a great many people are prepared to state confidently who wrote it. Unfortunately, their attributions cancel each other. What has long been sought, but not yet found, is proof of the authorship by the discovery of the saying in the published writings of the author to whom it is attributed. This authentication is never forthcoming. Many people are prepared to accept any attribution in a collection of quotations, forgetting that these authorities are at odds with each other. I have been informed positively that the quotation will be found in the writings of the following :—

Marcus Aurelius,
William Penn,
Stephen Grellet,
Professor Henry Drummond,

Robert Louis Stevenson,	Lord Houghton,
Thomas Carlyle,	An early fifteenth century sampler,
Thomas Payne,	W. S. Ross,
William C. Garnett,	Thomas à Kempis,
Colonel R. G. Ingersoll,	H. B. Hegeman,
Father Faber,	Sir Rowland Hill,
R. W. Emerson,	Joseph Addison,
Beatrice Harraden,	

and, I should think, half a dozen others. But no one has run it to earth.

A good many years ago Messrs. Bemrose and Sons published a card bearing the passage on one side and on the other the following statement :—

" This Resolve was written by a New York lady, much impressed with the thought of the uncertainty of life. Not many days after, she was at a meeting in Madison Square Gardens, where she had distributed some printed leaflets with the Resolve, when the Hall roof fell in, and she was one of those killed by the fall."

Mr. Moody (of Sankey and Moody) denied that he was the author, and, according to a statement of a correspondent of *Notes and Queries* (February 6th, 1897), could only say that he " secured it from a member of the Massachusetts Legislature who is now dead. This gentleman used to carry it in his pocket, showing it on every possible occasion in the House to those

with whom he came in contact." Here, again, no light is thrown on the authorship. The following similar thought is said to be found on a tombstone at Shrewsbury :—

> " For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
> Do all the good you can,
> To all the people you can,
> In all the ways you can,
> As long as ever you can."

In the course of a prolonged inquiry this interesting communication reached me from a Yorkshireman, who wrote : " The following ' Portrait of a True Gentleman ' was found in an old manor house in Gloucestershire, written and framed, and hung over the mantelpiece of a tapestried sitting-room " :—

" The true gentleman is God's servant, the world's master, and his own man, virtue is his business, study his recreation, contentment his rest, and happiness his reward. God is his father, Jesus Christ his Saviour, the saints his brethren, and all that need him his friend, Devotion is his chaplain, chastity his chamberlain, sobriety his butler, temperance his cook, hospitality his housekeeper, Providence his steward, charity his treasure, piety his mistress of the house, and discretion his porter to let in or out, as most fit. Thus is his whole family made up of virtue, and he is the true master of the house. *He is necessitated to be in the world on his way to heaven ; but he walks through it as fast as he can, and all his business by the way is to make himself and others happy.* Take him in two words—a Man and a Christian."

The lines italicised certainly appear to anticipate, or echo, the famous sentence whose authorship is still to seek.

An offer of a reward of £5 for the discovery of the author did not bring me a single valid claim, but it did bring me the following :—

"I am glad to see that you have offered a reward for the apprehension of the criminal who wrote 'I shall not pass this way again,' etc., and I hope that when you have caught him you will deal with him as he deserves. But, seriously, though the moral he draws may appeal to a limited number of very good people (who, however, do not need the stimulant), I think the average sinner is just as likely to draw the opposite one, even if he only does so subconsciously. As thus :—

"I shall not pass this way again,
So it's no matter what I do ;
I'll mess the pasture, spoil the track,
I do not care a damn for you.

"With broken bottles, empty tins,
I'll strew the road you've got to take ;
I shall not pass this way again,
I do not care what mess I make.

If every one of us expected to have to *return to* the scene of our exploits, I am inclined to think that we should be more careful to leave the world as we should like to find it."

The same correspondent added : "A lady tells me that she has seen the passage in some

museum inscribed in Chinese characters on a metal plate. Unfortunately she cannot remember where." Nobody ever does.

♣ ♣ ♣

BROAD YORKSHIRE.

A great many old English words for which there is no good equivalent in standard English have been abandoned to dialect, and in his "Leeds Dialect Glossary and Folk Lore" (of which he is his own publisher) Mr. John H. Wilkinson is justified in claiming that Yorkshire could surrender many such words to general use. He instances about seventy. Such words, however, if taken into regular dictionary English might undergo changes in spelling and pronunciation and lose their local tang, though not in all instances. London speech could well assimilate such a word as "dree," which means dreary, tedious. In Yorkshire they say, "Gardinin's a dree job i' this weather," or "It's a cowd (cold) and dree country abaht Cam Fell." Another such phrase is "threap down." Mr. Wilkinson gives the pronunciation, I understand, as "three-ap," but it would probably be pronounced "threep" in the South. He defines it "to dispute or contend in a determined manner," though his examples seem to disclose the stronger meaning of to browbeat, or to

contradict to the point of silencing. "Ah said ah saw 'im at t' Midland station, but he threap't meh dahn he worn't theer." "Down" usually accompanies "threap," but not always: "He'll fratch an' threap as long as yeh like afore he'll pay a single 'awp'ny." "Threaped down" expresses exactly one of Dr. Johnson's methods in argument. "Fratch" is a like word; it means to quarrel or "barge." "Listen tull 'em, they're fratchin' ageean." I wonder whether "fratch" has some connection with "fractious." Has "gawm" some obscure relation to "gumption"? It means sense, understanding: "He 'ears what ah say, bud he taks noa gawm on (of) it." This sentence, however, may leave it doubtful to which disputant the "gawm" belonged. "Gawmless" means stupid, devoid of understanding. "He's nowt but a gurt (great) gawmless fooil."

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"IN" OR "UNDER"?

Should one write "in the circumstances" or "under the circumstances"? The answer is *in*. The word "circumstance" cannot be divorced from its obvious meaning: standing within a circle. You stand in, not under, an environment. I know of one great London newspaper which will not permit "*under* the

circumstances" to appear in its pages—*in* any circumstances.

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WORDS THAT HAVE TURNED THEIR COATS.

Words that have changed their meanings, even to the point of reversal, form an interesting and not very small class. The verb to *scan* can now mean to scrutinise with special care, or to glance at casually, and rapidly, as in the phrase "he idly scanned his newspaper." *Let* is another such word, for we have to allow it opposite meanings in different contexts. What does Hamlet mean when he resolves to follow his father's ghost and exclaims to those who would stop him, "Unhand me, gentlemen. By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that *lets* me!"? He means that he will slay the man who does *not* let him. To "let" formerly meant to hinder; it now means to allow. These *lets* are different words, and it is necessary to know them as such.

❧

Prevent did not originally mean to hinder, but merely to go before. When the author of the 119th Psalm wrote, "I prevented the dawning of the morning . . . mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy

word," he did not mean that he caused the sun to stand still, or forbade the dusk to fall while he worshipped. One cannot say that *nice* ever meant nasty, but to Chaucer it meant foolish, and there is little doubt that this was its meaning in Shakespeare's mind when he wrote (in 2 Henry IV., 4, 1) " every idle, nice, and wanton reason." Halliwell defines " nice " (mediævally) as " foolish, stupid, dull, strange." It came to mean " effeminate " in a very opprobrious sense. In fact, there was a period when " nice " was a nasty word. Later, but in a derogatory sense, it meant particular, fastidious, finical ; later still, and in a laudatory sense, discriminating or refined. It also had the meanings of shy and reluctant. It meant also, closely logical, as in " a nice distinction," and it has the meaning still. But chiefly it is now the weak equivalent of pleasing, agreeable—as in " a nice book," whatever that may mean, or " a nice man," whatever kind of man that may be.

Demean is another of these turn-coat words. It meant simply to behave, or to conduct oneself. Hence Shakespeare wrote, " If York have *ill* demeaned himself." He might have *well* demeaned himself. Again, " They have de-

meaned themselves like men born to renown." In Shakespeare's time the word had not come to mean to lower or to degrade, and the only passage in which it could be thought to bear this meaning is that in the "Comedy of Errors," in which the courtesan says :—

> "Now, out of doubt Antipholus is mad,
> Else would he never so demean himself";

but here to demean has the sense of to conduct ("would he never so conduct himself"). Demean is from the French *démener*, and has nothing to do with meanness. The noun demeanour contains no such suggestion. Thackeray wrote : "He would demean himself by a marriage with an artist's daughter"; but the fact that such expressions will be found in good writers does not make them good. The proper verbs are to humble, to lower, to degrade, and others.

"Phenomenal" is a word that has all but turned somersault. It is now widely used—but never by good writers—in the sense of unusual or wonderful, and we even meet with the phrase "almost phenomenal." A phenomenon is not a wonderful event or spectacle, but simply an event, spectacle, or observed process, as in the

sentence (Huxley's): "Everyone is familiar with the common phenomena of a piece of metal being eaten away by rust." But one cannot take up a newspaper without finding "phenomenal" used in the sense of extraordinary. This is no figure of speech; I have just reached out my hand to the newspaper lying nearest to me, one of distinction, and within a minute I have read: "By the December of the following year the death-rate had dropped to the phenomenally low figure of forty-three." That fact is not "phenomenal" in the sense intended by the writer; any fact or any figure would have been "phenomenal," though it would have been superfluous to say so. Roget, in his invaluable "Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases," gives other examples. Shame*ful* and shame*less* mean nearly the same thing; *nervous* can mean either strong or weak. Many like oddities of divergent or opposed meanings in the same word could be adduced, and I may hope that in giving these examples I have *distracted* my readers without *distracting* them.

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A FREEMAN OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Wandering round a south coast resort, in a mood of holiday passiveness, willing rather than eager to be amused, I found myself reading a

curious document. It hung within a gilt frame in the window of an old curiosity and antiques shop, and purported to be a reprint of "an original signboard at Burton's Old Curiosity Shop, Falmouth." I was courteously allowed to copy it. Here it is :—

"ROGER GILES,

SURGIN, PARISH CLARK, AND SKULEMASTER, GROSER AND HUNDERTAKER.

"Respectably informs ladys and gentleman that he drors teef without wateing a minit, applies laches every hour, blisters on the lowest tarms, and vizicks for a penny a peace. He sells Godfather's kordales, kuts korns, bunyons, docters hosses, clips donkies, wance a month, and undertakes to luke ater every bodies nayls by the ear. Joesharps, penny wissels, brars kanelsticks, fryin pans, and other moozikal hinstrumints, hat grately reydooced figers. Young ladys and gentlemen larnes their grammur and langeudge in the purtiest mannar, also grate care taken off their morils and spellin. Also zarm-zinging, tayching the base vial, and all other zorts of fancy work, squadrils, pokers, weazels, and all country dances tort at home and abroad at perfekshun. Perfumin and snuff in all its branches. As times is cruel bad I begs to tell ee that i has just beginned to sell all sorts of stashonary ware, cox, hens, vouls, pigs, and all other kinds of poultry. Blackin-brishes, herrins, coles, scrubbin-brishes, traykel and godley bukes and bibles, mise-traps, brick-dist, whisker-seeds, morrel pokkerankerchers, and all zorts of swatemaits including taters sassages and other garden stuff, bakky, zizzars, lamp oyle, pattins, bukkits, grindin stones and other aitables, korn and bunyon zalve and all

hardware. I as laid in a large azzortement of trype, dogs mate, lolipops, ginger beer, matches and other pikkles, such as hepsom salts, hoysters, Winzer sope anzetrar.—Old rags bort and zold here and nowhere else, newlayed heggs by me Roger Giles ; zinging burdes, keeped, sich as howles, donkies, paykox, lobsters, crickets, also a stock of a celebrated brayder. Agent for selling gutty-porker souls. P.S.—I tayches gography, rithmetic, cowsticks, jimnastics and other chynees tricks."

As an anti-specialist, and as a freeman of the English language, Mr. Roger Giles deserves to be remembered.

There is reason to believe that Giles was a Westcountryman. His shop-bill is referred to in the Rev. S. Baring-Gould's life of Stephen Hawker, the poet Vicar of Morwenstowe, where it is quoted as an example of "English composition by a schoolmaster of the old style in Devonshire," and adds: "I should have held this to be an invention inspired by Caleb Quotem in George Colman's play, 'The Review,' but that Mr. Burton of the Curiosity Shop, Falmouth, has shown me old sign-boards almost as absurd."

"BUSINESS."

A word more or less ruined for literary purposes is *business*, which is simply busy-ness, or

any purpose or occupation on which we busy ourselves. Its narrowing to the operations of trade and commerce must, of course, be accepted. But the process is not yet complete. When we say "Mind your business" we do use the word in its old and broad sense, the sense of "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"—the sense, too, in which Shakespeare always used it. The words of Hamlet to Horatio, when he is maddened by the revelation made to him by his father's ghost, have always seemed to me to contain the largest and most affecting use of the word in our literature :—

> "I hold it fit that we shake hands and part;
> You, as your business and desire shall point you;
> For every man has business and desire."

But to-day "a man of business" is a man engaged in trade or commerce: Shakespeare has no such use for the word which gives us the adjective "business-like." In the Bible the word "business" occurs twenty-six times, but I do not think that in one instance it bears its modern restricted meaning, for even in the 107th Psalm, where we read, "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters," the word has certainly the larger meaning; no enlightened lexicographer would quote these words in the Leadenhall Street

sense. A nicer point may seem to arise in Proverbs xxii. 29 : " Seest thou a man diligent in his business ? " but it is apparent from the context that trade is not specially referred to, for the verse proceeds : " he shall stand before kings ; he shall not stand before mean men." Here the narrower meaning is neither necessary nor probable. The word stands for employment or occupation of any worthy kind.

RE-WRITING THE DECALOGUE.

With the deeper issues involved in the proposed revision of the Book of Common Prayer I have no wish to deal. The three legislative bodies of the Church of England—the Houses of Bishops, Clergy, and Laity—have been discussing this matter for sixteen years, and the National Church Assembly is receiving and considering the conclusions reached. Meanwhile, we have learnt the proposed drastic changes in the setting forth of the Ten Commandments. The most visible effect, if these proposals are adopted, will be to shorten the Decalogue considerably by the omission of expansions, whether in the nature of threats of punishment or promises of reward. The governing idea seems to be " to bring the Old Testament Commandments more into line with New Testament teaching."

The Decalogue, as proposed to be used, is as follows :—

1. God spake these words, and said : I am the Lord thy God : Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.

2. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.

3. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.

4. Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shalt thou labour and do all that thou hast to do ; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.

5. Honour thy father and thy mother.

6. Thou shalt do no murder.

7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

8. Thou shalt not steal.

9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.

10. Thou shalt not covet.

The effect, to my mind, is simply one of impoverishment and a withdrawal of old human interest.

The curtailment of the Tenth Commandment to " Thou shalt not covet " is surely not only

unnecessary, but misconceived. It is not a sin to covet, but only to covet wrongly. A man may rightly covet an honour if he is striving to deserve it. He may covet good things for others. If this amendment is made, then "Thou shalt not covet" will clash, verbally at least, with the New Testament injunction, "Covet earnestly the best gifts," and with St. Paul's other counsel to the Corinthians, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues"—the primary meaning of covet, acknowledged by the best dictionaries, being simply to desire eagerly and earnestly. Hence in "Henry VIII." the infant who is to become Queen Elizabeth is blessed by Cranmer in these words :—

> "Sheba was never
> More covetous of wisdom, and fair virtue,
> Than this pure soul shall be."

MILTON UNAWARES.

A correspondent wrote :—

"Mr. Augustine Birrell says that 'of all our poets, Milton is the one oftenest on our lips,' and it would be of interest to hear whose lips are swept up in the word 'ours.' It seems to me that the word 'our' has in this case a very limited application, and that Mr. Birrell's statement is scarcely founded on fact. I know many lovers of poetry to whom Milton is almost a stranger."

To many lovers of poetry Milton is almost a stranger, but Mr. Birrell was right. The phrases of no other English poet, except Shakespeare, have passed so numerously into our speech. We quote Milton when we say :—

"All is not lost."
"Hide their diminished heads."
"To be weak is miserable."
"Justify the ways of God to men."
"Fallen on evil days."
"The light fantastic toe."
"The cricket on the hearth."
"Old experience."
"A bevy of fair women."
"The palpable obscure."
"Tears such as angels weep."
"Chaos and Old Night."
"All hell broke loose."
"Where more is meant than meets the ear."
"That old man eloquent."
"Fresh woods and pastures new."
"A heaven on earth."
"The busy hum of men."
"Food of the mind."
"Temper justice with mercy."
"Dim religious light."
"To sport with Amaryllis in the shade."
"As children gathering pebbles on the shore."
"Not to know me argues yourselves unknown."
"Fit audience find though few."
"Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme."
"Nothing is here for tears."
"Musical as is Apollo's lute."
"Linkéd sweetness long drawn out."

" Rose like an exhalation."
" His red right hand."
" Best image of myself and dearer half."

The last expression may suggest to some that " better half " as applied to a wife is an adaptation of Adam's description of Eve. But Milton's line is evidently an adaptation of Sir Philip Sidney's " My better half." The phrase " a heaven on earth," often applied to the home or to a happy marriage, is from " Paradise Lost."

FREAKS OF COMPOSITION.

Mr. Bernard Shaw has told a London audience that most of his plays were written in the train between King's Cross and Hackney. If that is so, he exhibits a certain likeness between himself and Ibsen, who used to think out his plays in a crowded *café*, evening after evening. The notion that solitude and silence are necessary to the writer is exaggerated. The hum of life can be a great stimulus to thought. After all, a writer sets out to communicate something to his fellow men and women, and the sight of them may be an inspiration.

It is certain that a great deal of fine poetry was not composed, though it was written out,

on desk or table. Wordsworth went about his hills and dales making poetry aloud, and his weird vocal "bumming" of it became memory and a legend among the tramps and stone-breakers of the Lake District. Byron composed the whole of his "Corsair" walking up and down the pavement of Albemarle Street, Piccadilly. He said that he wrote it all in ten days—"a most humiliating confession, as it proves my own want of judgment in publishing and the public's in reading things which cannot have stamina for permanent attention." Yet "The Corsair" is read to-day, a hundred years after its author's death. Gray polished his "Elegy" for seven years, and its permanence is assured. But there is no law. Coleridge dreamed his poem "Kubla Khan," wrote it down from memory in a heat, was interrupted by "a man from Porlock," and left it an immortal fragment.

❧

Like Wordsworth, Byron, and many other poets, Dr. Johnson composed "in the air" and wrote at leisure. He composed seventy lines of his "Vanity of Human Wishes" in one day without writing one of them down until all were finished. He wrote his "Rambler" essays anyhow and anywhere, often under the utmost

pressure of the printer, without even reading them over.

Thus Johnson saved himself in great measure from the need to take the advice which he once received from an old tutor: "Read over your compositions, and wherever you meet with a passage particularly fine, strike it out." The brain is often more active at night than in the morning, but it is almost always more critical in the morning than at night. It is a good rule to *splurge* in the night hours, and in the morning to *purge*. On the other hand, Johnson maintained that a man may write at any time if he will set himself *doggedly* to it.

Words, however, are things; and the man who accords
To his language the license to outrage his soul,
Is controll'd by the words he disdains to control.

LORD LYTTON.

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